Commentary
April 2001

What Brings a World into Being?
David Berlinski

The "Diversity" Defense
Jason L. Riley

The Strange Adventures of Jacob d'Ancona
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Paradoxes of Painting
David Gelernter

Rights for Rodents
Damon Linker

"Traffic" and the War on Drugs
Gary Rosen

Whatever Happened to Bing Crosby
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Robert S. Wistrich • Dan Seligman • Noah D. Oppenheim
David Pryce-Jones • Daniel Pipes

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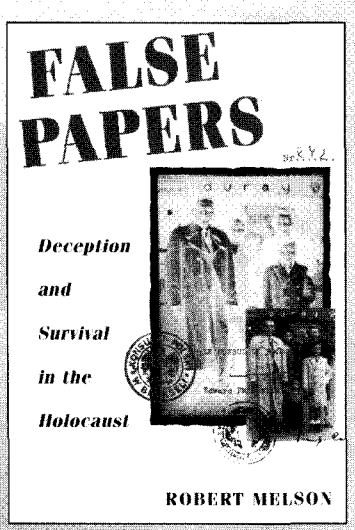

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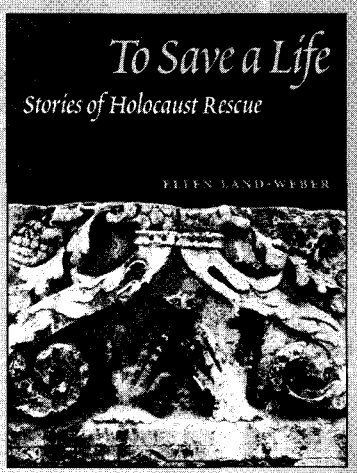

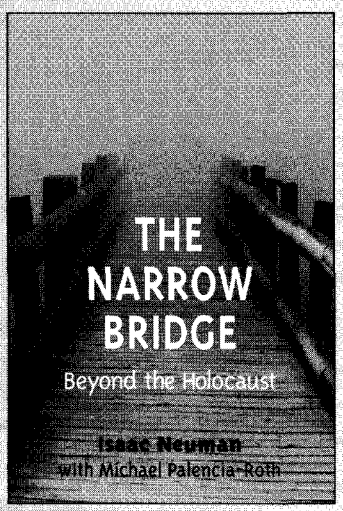

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Commentary

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Commentary
April 2001

Letters from Readers

Two Nations?

To the Editor:

Terry Teachout's article, "Republican Nation, Democratic Nation?," [with a comment by Gertrude Himmelfarb, January] abounds in unsupported generalities. He claims that "today a young voter who opposes gun control, or supports public-school vouchers, will quickly see that there in no place for him in Democratic Nation." I am an attorney living in suburban Boston; I am proud of my membership in the National Rifle Association; I support completely the public-school voucher programs put forward by Democrats like Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist and Senator (not vice-presidential candidate) Joseph Lieberman. And yet, not only is there a place for me in Democratic Nation, I happen to serve as a Democratic member of my town committee.

Rob Meltzer
Framingham, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

Does Terry Teachout really think the cultural split he sees in this country is solely the fault of liberals? Moderate Democrats, he suggests, should "disavow the poisonous rhetoric that has lately become a staple of their party's political discourse." But surely conservatives are guilty of this same rhetoric. Newt Gingrich once claimed liberalism was to blame for Susan Smith's murdering her children. In another instance, House Majority Leader Dick Armey "accidentally" called Congressman Barney Frank "Barney Fag."

Clearly, moderates of both wings need to restrain their extremist colleagues. Liberals must remember not to mock those who take their faith seriously. And conservatives must remember that homosexuality may just be an alternative lifestyle, on-screen nudity may not be a mortal sin, and a woman seeking an abortion may just be desperate and young, with no other alternative.

Bruce L. Brager
Arlington, Virginia

To the Editor:

Terry Teachout's article on the growing gulf between the two Americas brings clarity to a situation that many observed on election night. But a couple of his examples struck me as at best incorrect and at worst disingenuous.

First, he says that the tactics of the "permanent campaign" were "perfected by the Clinton-Gore administration." But on election night in 1992, it was Bob Dole who appeared on television saying that Bill Clinton's election was illegitimate and that he had no mandate. Dole's remarks were far worse than anything Gore said about our current and truly illegitimate President.

Second, Mr. Teachout asserts that a young woman "for whom the preservation of *Roe* v. *Wade* by any means necessary is the highest of political priorities is fully as 'religious' in her own way as a Southern Baptist mother of three who backs school vouchers in the hopes of being able to send her children to a Christian academy." The comparison is inappropriate. The abortion-rights supporter is working in favor of legal access to a service that does not in any way infringe on the rights of anyone who disagrees with abortion on moral grounds; those who do not want to have abortions are free not to have them. By contrast, the Southern Baptist mother, in using a voucher to send her child to a Christian school, removes funds from public schools to which other taxpayers send their children. Her choice directly affects other citizens, regardless of their views.

Both women may be "religious," but the latter, in the exercise of her beliefs, is using government in a way that has a negative impact on others.

Levi T. Stahl
Chicago, Illinois

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TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout cites a comment by John Podhoretz to the effect that "the voting population can indeed be divided into two camps: those who have a direct or indirect financial interest in government and those who wish to be protected from government encroachment." Mr. Teachout implies that Democratic Nation is in the former camp and Republican Nation in the latter. The facts, however, suggest a different picture.

Three recent items from the *New York Times* will serve as evidence. One news article, "Failing Farmers Learn to Profit from Federal Aid," pointed out that in Republican Montana, "government assistance made up 100 percent of overall farm income" last year. A second article explained that "generally, Southern states received billions more dollars from the federal government than their residents paid in taxes"; it then quoted Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "When you look at [the] electoral map and see who voted [Democratic]—those are the states that are going to be sending money to the states that voted [Republican]." Finally, John Tierney, a *Times* columnist, wrote: "As the states turned red and blue on election night, the map was remarkably similar to a map in *The Federal Budget and the States*. . . . The states voting Democratic were the ones paying more in taxes than they got back from Washington."

Indeed, of the top ten states that received more from Washington than they paid in taxes in the last fiscal year, eight (Montana, Virginia, North and South Dakota, West Virginia, Alaska, Mississippi, and Alabama) voted Republican in the 2000 election. Nor was last year an anomaly. As Senator Moynihan's studies have shown, the L-shaped swath that is Republican Nation has been living off Washington for decades.

DEREK L. A. HACKETT
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout's proposition that we are now two nations is based primarily on demographics. But population trends are dynamic. In the late 18th century, for example, everything west of the Appalachians was considered the "other" America. As the West was settled, the Rocky Mountains delineated that "other." Such boundaries are constantly shifting; but this nation has not been truly divided geographically since the Civil War.

Unfortunately, Mr. Teachout fails to see the real causes of division today: unequal educational prospects, unequal employment opportunities, and pernicious racism, all of which are rooted in an economic model that condemns our poorest citizens to a future devoid of hope.

CHARLES RUBENS II
Scarsdale, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

While I cannot quarrel with figures showing that unmarried people voted more often for Gore, as did gays, blacks, and union members, I disagree with the gloss Terry Teachout puts on the figures. It was not, for instance, the campaign of George McGovern that caused the historic change from a Democratic to a Republican South. That process got under way much earlier, when two successive Democratic administrations forcefully confronted segregation.

JONATHAN E. SCHIFF
St. Bernard, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout's "Republican Nation, Democratic Nation?" was mostly, in the words of Gertrude Stein, "interesting if true." But he falsely characterizes as "inflammatory" a lengthy comment by Paul Begala, the Clinton partisan.

Begala was himself responding to an assertion by the columnist Mike Barnicle that the split balloting—with an overwhelming number of rural counties voting for Bush and urban counties on both coasts voting for Gore—implied a cultural divide in America: in Barnicle's phrase, "Wal-Mart versus Martha Stewart," "Family values versus a sense of entitlement," or, in other words, good moral Republicans versus bad immoral Democrats.

Viewed in this context, Begala's remarks, pointing out, for example, that Wyoming, the state where Matthew Shepard was killed, went Republican, as did Oklahoma, "where right-wing extremists blew up a federal office building," were a nuanced, gently ironic rejoinder. I find it hard to believe that Mr. Teachout was unaware of this.

STEVE SIMELS
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The "two nations" concept advanced by Terry Teachout is inadequate and misleading. Since 50 percent of the American public do not participate in politics at all, it would be difficult to place them in either nation. Most people are occupied with the vagaries of life. They rarely look to the state for their happiness, and indeed can find its interference to be a burden.

DENNIS LAFFERTY
Grand Saline, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout hits the nail on the head. As he points out, Gore's vote came almost exclusively from "cities, their surrounding suburbs, and liberal-voting college towns"—but the actual results are even more dramatic than this. The cities of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles taken together gave Gore a plurality of 3.2 million votes. Outside these four cities, Bush won the remaining popular vote by 2.7 million ballots. And outside the narrow confines of New York City (narrow at least to a Coloradan), Bush won the remaining national popular vote by nearly a million.

Probably more important, however, is the issue to which Mr. Teachout devotes only one short sentence—that 90 percent of the African-American vote went to Gore. Put differently, this means that Bush won the remaining vote, including all other ethnic groups, by at least 7 million.

The effectiveness of Gore's campaign to demonize Bush on the race issue and get out the black vote is shown dramatically by the polls in Texas. Whereas, in the 1998 gubernatorial election, Bush received 29 percent of the state's black vote, in the recent presidential balloting he received only 5 percent. At the national level, in spite of reaching out to the NAACP and other African-

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American organizations, Bush did worse than Bob Dole four years earlier.

RICHARD JANSEN
Fort Collins, Colorado

TO THE EDITOR:

The essays on the election by Terry Teachout and Gertrude Himmelfarb were superb, though I wish they had given us the benefit of their views on the Jewish and black votes. What continues to perplex me is not why overwhelming majorities of both groups went for Al Gore but how the Republican party is to win over such voters.

RICHARD K. MASON
Altadena, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Neither Terry Teachout's article, "Republican Nation, Democratic Nation?," nor the comment on it by Gertrude Himmelfarb mentions that America's new tribes also differ in their attitudes and capacities regarding military power. This difference is at least as pregnant with trouble as any other.

The divide was especially evident in the November election, during which the Clinton administration removed polling stations from military bases, absentee ballots from much of the Pacific Command went undelivered, and Democrats repeatedly tried to disqualify the votes of military personnel.

This is the sort of thing that can be cured by policy. Less amenable to a quick fix, however, is the social and cultural chasm that has opened up between the kinds of families that serve in the armed forces and those that do not. True, families that belong to labor unions, for example, are very much represented in the military, and such families also share the social conservatism of many Republicans. But for the most part these families are not drawn from the new, government-workforce side of labor. African-Americans in uniform also tend to come from the church-going rather than from the government-dependent side of their community. All these, who once would have been called Reagan Democrats, fit well with the married, religious, largely white middle-American families who provide the bulk of the armed forces.

The cultural divide is rooted in how the members of the new upper class are brought up—in their amusements, in what they read, and in how they speak. Children destined for the boardroom or the professional suite are deterred from playing war or cowboys-and-Indians. Some schools ban football and wrestling. Hunting and familiarity with guns are almost criminalized. School-age children read nothing that would justify killing or dying for any cause, much less for our deeply flawed country.

Academics who do not worry about the gap between the elites and the military cite the fact that armies in 18th-century Europe were largely made up of riffraff. But they forget that members of the 18th-century ruling classes fought as officers alongside the riffraff. Those who do worry about the civilian-military divide typically suggest policies to change the *military* culture. And in fact, over the past generation, civilian pressure has largely succeeded in promoting to higher ranks persons who, for practical purposes at least, accept the elites' cultural preferences. Increasingly, the lower ranks have been required to show quotidian obeisance to elite racial and sexual politics—which is one big reason why so many are leaving the military altogether.

Democratic Nation's incapacity to fill our military ranks is a matter of identity, not policy. That is why we hear virtually no discussion of the only measure that would surely restore a cultural balance in the armed forces—namely, that more members of the elite serve. During the ten years I spent on the Stanford campus, I encountered perhaps five out of some 7,500 graduating young men going into the armed forces.

Being unable to fill the military, Democratic Nation hires Republican Nation instead, commanding it in ways that alienate and then bemoaning its recalcitrance. This sort of thing cannot last forever.

ANGELO CODEVILLA
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

I was taken by Terry Teachout's analysis of the election and Gertrude Himmelfarb's accompanying comments, and I would agree with them that most of the great political and economic questions that once divided the Right and Left have been settled. But with regard to the disturbing "cultural" gap of which they both speak, I would add this: in my experience interviewing American parents about the challenges of raising children, I have noted considerable frustration with professional elites and their domination of our nation's institutional life.

The failure of schools, social services, the media, and the legal system to support the values and priorities of the average American parent accounts, I believe, for a great deal of the shift in the electoral landscape. I would surmise also that it accounts for a certain amount of voter apathy. Many of the median-income parents I have talked to are demoralized. They insist they are powerless to change the "system."

Contrary to Gertrude Himmelfarb, then, I believe that America's two cultures do reflect a class division: namely, a division between the New Class and the rest of America.

DANA MACK
Institute for American Values
New York City

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

The thesis I put forward in "Republican Nation, Democratic Nation?" was just that—an attempt to explain the political-cultural divide that so clearly manifested itself in the 2000 elections. It cannot explain every aspect of that divide, nor am I positive that it fully explains any of them. That is why the title ended with a question mark. But it puzzles me that a great many Republicans seem not to want to think at all about the cultural chasm in America. These sanguine folk are apparently counting on George W. Bush's ability to charm and disarm Democrats, to which I can only reply that we shall see what happens if and when the Democrats regain control of one or both houses of Congress.

It also puzzles me that many people who question the two-nations thesis itself, including a number of my

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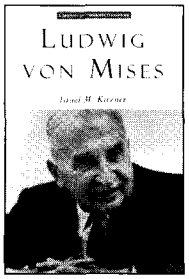

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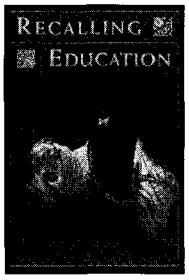

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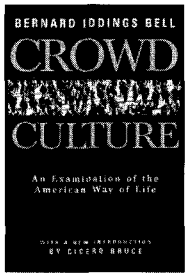

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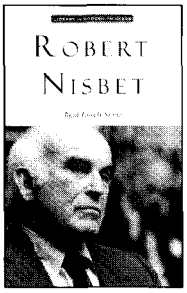

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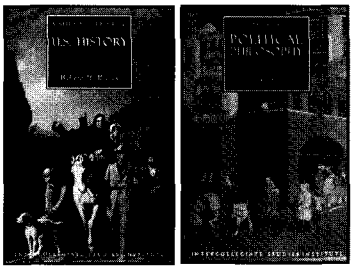

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correspondents, seem unwilling to engage it, raising objections that are essentially anecdotal. Does the fact that I live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan have any bearing on the far more important fact that virtually all of my neighbors voted for Al Gore? Clearly not, any more than Rob Meltzer's support of public-school vouchers and membership in the NRA has relevance to what the rest of the Democratic party thinks and does. Indeed, I might be slightly more inclined to agree with Mr. Meltzer had Joseph Lieberman not cravenly disavowed every heterodox political position he had ever expressed in public in order to become the Democratic vice-presidential candidate.

By the same token, and contrary to what Bruce L. Brager and Levi T. Stahl suggest, the existence of Republicans who have said stupidly inflammatory things about Democrats does not vitiate the fact that to Democratic Nation belongs the credit, or blame, for systematically endeavoring to demonize all who dare to disagree with its views. To it, too, accrues the vast advantage of having its opinions amplified and repeated daily by the major media. It was not Newt Gingrich who invented political correctness. (Al Gore campaigned as though *he* did.)

Several other correspondents, it seems to me, are similarly arguing beside the point. Thus, in comparing rates of government assistance to red versus blue states, Derek L.A. Hackett raises an interesting irony, but one that is, as he himself seems to realize, irrelevant to the cultural questions I was discussing; Charles Rubens II's reliance on racism and poverty to explain our situation is a line of analysis that went out with the 60's; and Jonathan E. Schiff needs to take a closer look at the Neanderthal racial attitudes of southern Democratic politicians in the same decade.

Somewhat more to the point, both Mr. Brager and Mr. Stahl raise the issue of abortion—but in ways that further illustrate the divide I was describing. Mr. Brager plants at least one jumbo axiom squarely in the middle of his assertion that "a woman seeking an abortion may just be desperate and young, with no other alternative"; but there is *always* an alternative to abortion (namely, not to have one), and anyway the real abortion problem in America arises from middle-class women who abort out of convenience, not desperation. Mr. Stahl, for his part, says that "the abortion-rights supporter is working in favor of legal access to a service that does not in any way infringe on the rights of anyone who disagrees with abortion on moral grounds," a ringing declaration of libertarian principles that (a member of Republican Nation might point out) somehow neglects to take into account the unborn child whose rights are abrogated absolutely.

Steve Simels rises to the defense of Paul Begala. Although he is entitled to his own interpretation, I found Begala's original remarks neither "nuanced" nor "gently ironic" but rather like the prejudicial comments a shady lawyer "accidentally" blurts out within earshot of a jury, knowing they will be stricken from the official record. I also read the later piece in which Begala claimed to have been deliberately misinterpreted by his enemies, and found it shamelessly disingenuous (disingenuousness being an art at which Begala, in defending Bill Clinton on the talk-show circuit, has had much practice).

Dennis Lafferty raises a serious point of contention, and one that I addressed explicitly in my essay. That half of all Americans do not participate in the political process necessarily complicates any attempt to generalize about the views of Republican Nation and Democratic Nation. On the other hand, those Americans who fail to vote are by definition irrelevant to the political life of their country—and that too is a good part of what we are talking about.

I am, frankly, much more concerned that blacks, as both Richard Jansen and Richard K. Mason point out, are now cleaving almost unanimously to a Democratic party that takes their support for granted. This is a recipe for political marginalization, which can only lead to further alienation. President Bush's attempts to reach out to blacks are thus more than a matter of mere pragmatism—they are perhaps the best possible thing he and the Republican party can do at the present moment to narrow the gulf between the races. My guess is that Bush's outreach will have little or no effect on blacks of middle age and older; it can only be hoped that, over time, younger blacks who feel more confident about their middle-class status will become open to the possibility of breaking with a party that is not acting in their interests. But that is for another day.

Finally, Angelo Codevilla is right about the significance of "the gap between the elites and the military," just as Dana Mack is right about the significance of the refusal of those same elites to "support the values and priorities of the average American parent." I hope that as more people look closely at the two-nations thesis, they will explore aspects of it that I was unable to discuss in a piece written within days of what may come to be remembered as one of the most fateful presidential elections of modern times.

Living with Computers

TO THE EDITOR:

In his article, "Computers and the Pursuit of Happiness" [January], David Gelernter completely misses the key points. For one thing, while it is true, as he writes, that our need for food, shelter, and clothing has not changed significantly because of technology, the methods of acquiring these goods certainly have. I do not have to hunt for lunch with a spear; rather, it is produced and distributed very efficiently with the help of computers.

For another thing, and of far greater importance, the Internet extends the very substantial changes in Western civilization brought about by the printing press. The printed word enabled Western civilization's overthrow of the monarchical systems of government, certainly a sea change in the way we once lived and thought. In our own lifetime, television was the piv-

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Ariel Sharon

Will his "yad chazak", his strong hand, bring peace?

Ariel ("Arik") Sharon has now been elected Prime Minister of Israel. He decisively defeated Ehud Barak, who lost the election even though he had close to 100% support from the Israeli Arabs. Israel's Jews, having at long last understood the futility of the Oslo Accord "peace process" and of the appeasement of the Palestinians, were ready for a radical change. But Ariel Sharon is much maligned, often called a murderer and a war criminal. There are three myths that his detractors propagate.

What are the facts?

Myth #1: The war in Lebanon. Sharon's enemies accuse him of having launched the "Peace for Galilee" War in Lebanon in 1982 unnecessarily and without knowledge or permission from Prime Minister Menachem Begin. But that is nonsense, of course. Israel, in contrast to all Arab states, is a democratic country, governed by civilian authority. Not even a presumed "warlord" (as Sharon is regularly titled) could start any military action, let alone a full-blown war, without the full approval of the government. The war in Lebanon, reviled though it may be now, was at the time an existential necessity for Israel. An intense and vicious civil war between the Moslems and the Christian Maronites was going on in that country, a civil war that began in earnest when the PLO entered Lebanon in 1970. They established their own "mini kingdom" in that unhappy country. Over 100,000 people were killed. From their base in Lebanon, the PLO had launched innumerable terrorist attacks against Israel and was poised for a major invasion. When Israel "invaded" Lebanon, the Lebanese civilians, delighted to be freed from the terror of the PLO, greeted the Israeli soldiers as their liberators, with flowers of happiness and hope. Sharon led his victorious troops to the outskirts of Beirut. He refrained from entering Beirut itself only because of the tens of thousands of casualties it would have caused, most of them Lebanese. Under pressure of world opinion -- mostly, sad to say, that of the United States -- he allowed Arafat and his PLO to escape to Tunis, where they were poised to plan further mischief and destruction that destabilizes the Middle East until today.

Myth #2: The Massacre of Sabra and Shatilla. The gravest accusation against Ariel Sharon is that he condoned or perhaps even instigated the massacre of about 800 Lebanese Moslems in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps. The reality is that the perpetrators of this horrific crime were Christian Falangist murderers, who by stealth invaded these camps and acted in revenge of the assassination of Lebanon's president elect, Bashir Jamayel. Sharon's detractors claim that he should have been aware of this assault or that he was aware and did nothing to prevent it. But nobody outside the camps could have known what was happening, because the invading Christians used no guns -- only knives in perpetrating their crimes. Not a single shot was fired. *Time* magazine published a story on the events, in which it clearly accused Sharon of complicity in this horrendous crime. Sharon sued Time for libel -- and won. But the slander that Sharon was responsible for the massacre has not died down and continues to be assiduously propagated in Arab and Moslem media and also in much of the rest of the world.

> "The 'yad chazak' -- the strong hand of Ariel Sharon -- is needed to bring peace with security to Israel and to the Middle East."

Myth #3: The "Al Aksa Intifada". The current Intifada -- the bloody uprising of the Palestinians against Israel -- did not, as the media like to report, start with Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. That visit, which had been arranged beforehand and which had been "approved" by the Palestinian Authority, was simply a pretext. This uprising, which could be called the "Rosh Hashanah War of 2000", actually started days earlier, on September 23, 2000, when a Palestinian policeman killed point-blank his Israeli counterpart, with whom he had been on patrol two days earlier. Mr. Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount was simply the signal to start this uprising, which voluminous intelligence proves to have been planned way in advance. And why shouldn't Sharon, why shouldn't any Jew, be allowed to visit the Temple Mount, which, with its Western Wall, is the holiest site for all Jews, the focus of all their longings? Any Arab can visit any place, any holy place, including the Western Wall, in any part of Israel without being questioned and without being molested. What is it with the Moslems that they go berserk if a Jew visits one of their holy sites? To blame Sharon for provoking and starting the Al Aksa Intifada makes as little sense as to believe that World War I would not have started had Arch Duke Ferdinand not been assassinated in Sarajevo.

The media is mounting a smear campaign against Ariel Sharon, describing him as an out-of-control warmonger, a man on a perpetual warpath, someone who, if elected, would not hesitate to use troops against the Palestinians and all other Arabs. The reality is that Israel desperately needs Sharon. He is an Israeli hero, who played a decisive role in Israel's brilliant victory against combined Arab might in the Six-Day War, who, with his bold thrust into Egypt, encircled that country's Third Army in the Yom Kippur War and thus turned near-defeat into glorious victory, and who, in his various ministerial roles, has performed fearlessly and most successfully. After the disastrous regime of Ehud Barak, a man who was intimidated by President Clinton and who was putty in the hands of Arafat, the "yad chazak" -- the strong hand of Ariel Sharon -- is needed to bring peace with security to Israel and to the Middle East. The Arabs in Palestine, Syria, and all the rest will know that this is a man that cannot be pushed around, but also that any agreements that he will enter into will be scrupulously kept. Welcome, Arik, as Prime Minister of Israel!

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otal factor in the overthrow of the Soviet regime, accomplishing quietly what all of America's missiles could not. Today, the Internet is challenging China's ability to repress the development of ideas in that culture.

To suggest that a worldwide, person-to-person medium will have little or no impact, as Mr. Gelernter does, is to be an extreme Luddite. The web holds the potential of increasing our ability to deal with our own government's bureaucratic complex, which is the greatest threat to individual freedom today. We, the electorate, can follow bills through committee, through debate, and correspond directly with our representatives and their staff. Ultimately, the Internet may help facilitate direct voting on important issues such as taxes and government spending.

Most important, the Internet will bring comprehensive education to more and more people throughout the world. Marshall McLuhan gave us the startling image of a camel driver listening to a radio in the desert—no longer separated from the rest of the world. The Internet will extend not just communication but a universe of educational experience to all the remote peoples of the world, even if their remoteness is the result of economic rather than geographical factors. The impact of this spreading education is unpredictable, but, if history is any example, it will be used to enhance freedom.

WINN F. MARTIN
Atlanta, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR:

In trying to answer the three questions he poses in the first paragraph of "Computers and the Pursuit of Happiness," David Gelernter muddles things badly.

First, he asks whether computers and the Internet are a revolutionary development in human history. This is purely a matter of opinion. In order to answer, we need to know how fast, pervasive, and radical has been the social change thus effected. The absence of any quantitative criteria in Mr. Gelernter's article means that the only basis for his conclusion—that there has been no "revolution"—is his own emotional disposition toward the change.

Second, Mr. Gelernter assures us that we are not in an information age because "computers have not lessened our need for food, clothing, shelter, possessions, and, above all, each other." But this is bogus, as becomes plain when he himself inconsistently acknowledges the importance of the "industrial age" despite the fact that it, too, did not lessen our need for any of those things.

From the fact that "we now have sophisticated machines to create, store, and deliver information," Mr. Gelernter tells us, people mistakenly conclude we are in a new information age. But, he goes on, machines that create, move, and store information were a main preoccupation of the entire 20th century. The preoccupation may indeed be the same; but computers and the Internet have dramatically increased the rate, pervasiveness, and degree of social change.

Next, Mr. Gelernter acknowledges that machines can act intelligently, insofar as their performance simulates what we regard as intelligent human action (playing chess, solving puzzles, proving theorems, etc.). But, he explains, "We will never get a computer to think until we have figured out how to make one hallucinate. To reproduce thought on a computer, we will need to reproduce the whole cognitive spectrum and not just one narrow slice of it."

This requirement is completely arbitrary. Human beings who cannot think across the whole cognitive spectrum nevertheless think: someone who can imaginatively interpret poetry may not be able to do higher mathematics, and someone who is not capable of doing either may be able to design clothing.

Finally, Mr. Gelernter asserts that were computers to become fully conscious and smarter than humans, we would nevertheless retain our "uniqueness." In this connection, he takes issue with a distinguished technologist who wants us to stop believing we are "somehow different from animals." But Mr. Gelernter's argument that our uniqueness rests in "the scraps of morality and sanctity we pieced together over the long, hard centuries" seems inept. Many mammals—dolphins, elephants, gray wolves, giant otters, domestic dogs—live among their own kind far more harmoniously than humans do among theirs.

ROBERT HOFFMAN
Jamaica, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter is right that computers have not revolutionized society. The changes in daily life arising out of the inventions of the second half of the 20th century were smaller than those arising out of the second half of the century before.

But it is very hard to say whether *any* technology has made people happier. It is easier, rather, to evaluate the mitigation of sources of *unhappiness*. For instance, it often made our ancestors unhappy that half of their offspring died in childhood, and it made many children unhappy to become orphans at an early age. Medical technology has lowered the infant-mortality rate, and increased the average human lifespan.

What unhappiness have computers mitigated? One of my elderly relatives lives in a retirement home. She anticipates that e-mail will keep her in touch with her sister, her daughter, and her many friends better than letters and phone calls have done. Even so, computers will not mitigate as much unhappiness as do her stroke-prevention medications.

JOHN MCCARTHY
Stanford University
Stanford, California

DAVID GELERNTER writes:

It is true that, as Winn F. Martin mentions, computers are helpful in producing food; cow manure is, too, and yet this is not the Manure Age (or maybe it is). I agree with him that the Internet will have "impact." We already have a "worldwide, person-to-person medium" in the form of the telephone, and it has had plenty of "impact," so the Internet probably will as well.

I also agree that the Internet can help us deal with government bureaucracy; this is an argument I made at length in *Mirror Worlds* (1991), and it has since begun to come true. "Direct voting," however, would be a disaster for America. One

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of the greatest things about this great nation is that, for the most part, no one has to pay any more attention to the government than he wants to. Millions of Americans exercise daily their right not to know.

I believe with Mr. Martin that computers will indeed be good for American education, as I said in my piece. Mainly, I think this is true not because computers are so wonderful but because American education is so awful. As for "worldwide comprehensive education," books are a far more powerful technology than computers or the Internet: they are cheaper to buy, run, and maintain, easier to operate, more portable, durable, and flexible, better designed from an ergonomic point of view, and already available on a wide range of topics. If books haven't brought about "worldwide comprehensive education," why should computers? I guess I must be an "extreme Luddite" after all.

Robert Hoffman is right: everything I said in my article was "purely a matter of opinion." But an argument can be "qualitative" and nonetheless true. (I believe that democracy is better than dictatorship, although my reasons for thinking so are purely qualitative.) It is true that the industrial revolution did not lessen our need for food, clothing, and shelter, any more than computers have; it did not lessen demand, but it vastly increased supply. That is what made it a revolution. I do not think computers and the Internet have done anything much for "social change." In recent decades, social change has sometimes been good, often bad; in any case, we don't blame computers.

Mr. Hoffman is wrong; every human being can think "across the whole cognitive spectrum": everyone is capable of logical thought (e.g. "I'm hungry; therefore I should eat"); everyone is capable of dreaming. That is the whole cognitive spectrum, from end to end. (I made up the term, so I get to define it.)

That dolphins live harmoniously with each other (let's grant this for the sake of argument) has nothing to do with morality. This is too basic a point to investigate here, but an act is morally praiseworthy only if you had a choice. Anyway, my claim that "humans are unique" was not based on the premise that "humans live harmoniously with each other." I have heard that they do not.

I think John McCarthy is exactly right.

Bombs Away

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of my book, *The Transformation of American Air Power* [January], Andrew J. Bacevich suggests that I stop "just short" of making the grandiose claim that "air power has conclusively demonstrated its ability to win conventional wars." In fact, I stop considerably short of making any such claim. I stressed that "air power has by no means become a universally applicable tool providing an answer to every conceivable security challenge that might arise." And I cautioned that "since air power can be everything from totally decisive to totally irrelevant . . . depending on the situation, attempting to argue for an aerospace-centric U.S. defense strategy for all occasions is possibly the single most self-destructive error that air-power proponents can make."

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these are sufficiently interwoven throughout the book that Mr. Bacevich cannot possibly have missed them all. One can only conclude that, as a retired army colonel, he was less interested in engaging the book on its merits than in using it as a foil for making an interservice turf-war pronouncement of his own.

Either way, the unnamed "military theorists" whom Mr. Bacevich excoriates for "touting air power as an all-purpose elixir—low-cost, risk-free, with results guaranteed" do not include either myself, the most senior leaders of today's air force, or virtually any other responsible advocate of American air power.

BENJAMIN S. LAMBETH
Santa Monica, California

ANDREW J. BACEVICH writes:

I am sorry that Benjamin S. Lambeth does not like my review of his book. To set the record straight, here, from his concluding chapter, is his assessment of the capacity of modern-day American air power: "it is time for airmen . . . to play up the fact that air power, properly applied, can now quickly neutralize armies and surface navies anywhere."

This is, to put it mildly, a large claim. It is also a claim that his book and recent events fail to substantiate—which may be why, in his letter, Mr. Lambeth is eager to distance himself from it. One can certainly understand this, but it changes nothing.

TV Guide

TO THE EDITOR:

Several years ago, my wife and I decided to eliminate television from our house for many of the reasons Kay S. Hymowitz lists in her article, "The Sex and Violence Show" [December 2000]. But while I agree with much of what she says, I would like to question a few of her points.

She argues that parents have little basis for complaining about the content of commercial advertisements on television when the shows themselves are no less explicit. But even during such "healthy" shows as baseball games, there are often advertisements for violent shows to be broadcast at another time.

Next, she cites the example of Japan, where children are exposed to very violent cartoons yet remain relatively docile compared to their American counterparts. In recent years, however, more and more violence has been reported in Japanese schools. Exposure to violent television programs is probably at least partially to blame.

Finally, though she is correct to emphasize the need for increased parental supervision as opposed to government involvement, there is one area where government might have a role. While the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) cannot regulate television content, it is responsible for ensuring that owners of TV broadcast licenses serve the public interest. Since shows with explicit sexual and violent content clearly do not do this, the government could decide not to renew these licenses.

DORON BECKER
Potomac, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

Kay S. Hymowitz is correct to say that except for the occasional copycat crime, research has failed to establish a link between violent entertainment and violent behavior. Without exception, the people I know who insist that such a link exists are not social scientists; rather, they are avid readers. Instead of arguing merely that people should watch TV less and read more, they try to give social urgency to their position by arguing that watching the tube causes violent behavior.

I hope Kay Hymowitz's article helps put a stop to all the pseudoscience that surrounds our thinking about the medium of television. With the arrival of such excellent networks and stations as C-SPAN, PBS, the Discovery and Learning channels, Bravo, CNN, and the magnificent History Channel, it would be hard today to call TV, in Newton Minow's famous phrase, "a vast wasteland."

ROGER KOLB
Somerville, Massachusetts

KAY S. HYMOWITZ writes:

Doron Becker is correct that commercials for violent TV shows and movies appear during baseball games and other family fare. And I wholeheartedly agree that the FTC should ensure that the media companies live up to their promises and avoid advertising R-rated movies during those times. The fact remains, however, that the public discussion last fall following the release of the FTC's report was highly disingenuous in avoiding the issue of parental responsibility. As I pointed out in my article, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, half of all parents report having no rules about what their kids watch on television, an estimate that is surely low given that two-thirds of all children have televisions in their bedrooms. This suggests that a majority of American parents are not especially concerned about the very things the FTC report was supposed to have found so shocking.

As for the case of Japanese children, it is my understanding that violent television has been around for quite a while in Japan, while school violence there is something relatively new. It is more likely that, if the Japanese are experiencing an increase in juvenile violence, it is because of some weakening in the traditional social strictures that have always counteracted antisocial impulses in that relatively crime-free country, including those impulses fleetingly aroused by sensational television.

Mr. Becker raises an interesting point when he recalls the FTC's mission to ensure that owners of TV broadcast licenses "serve the public interest." At one time, this may have seemed a worthy and achievable goal. But these days, when even our most elite cultural institutions have fallen afoul of political correctness, there is every reason to doubt that federal regulators and network executives would be able to define the meaning of "public interest"—and to worry if they actually did.

Finally, I thank Roger Kolb for reminding us that with the advent of cable, television is no longer simply "a vast wasteland." For the large majority of American kids, however, I fear that cable equals nothing more edifying than MTV and ESPN, and that Newton Minow's words still hold.

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Democracy in China

TO THE EDITOR:

I found Arthur Waldron's "A Free and Democratic China?" [November 2000] to be one of the most insightful articles I have read on the prospects for China's political development. Yet the time I have spent in Chinese villages and cities talking informally to farmers and rural migrants leads me to disagree with some of his points.

Mr. Waldron argues that the claim to legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is based on an implicit agreement with the Chinese people: the CCP promises ever greater economic prosperity but in return expects domestic peace. This, he suggests, is a rather fragile foundation, being subject both to the business cycle and the economy's long-term growth. Although basically accurate, this view needs refinement.

Many Western scholars seem unaware of the extent to which the CCP has in fact lived up to its end of the bargain. Whereas a typical developing country might have a landless rural population of 25 or 30 percent, today there are no peasants in China who are landless by choice. Not only is land guaranteed for all, but a relatively egalitarian distribution is maintained as well. This is an important expectation of Chinese farmers, and when it is violated, protest almost always follows. (Chinese farmers completely accept income differentials that they perceive to be based on effort or talent, but those based on unequal access to the village's resources are viewed with great enmity.)

The CCP has also fulfilled its historical agreement with the peasants by encouraging rural industrialization, which has been the engine of recent rapid growth. Crucially, the proceeds have been steered in such a way as to benefit the broader community rather than just a few owners. This is accomplished sometimes through village ownership of the factories but most often by subcontracting to private entrepreneurs who agree to meet certain community goals, like creating greater job opportunities for villagers.

On the occasions when the CCP has violated the expectations of the peasants, the government has paid for it with sharply declining legitimacy. The most obvious example of this was the Great Leap Forward. In the collectivization campaign of 1955-56, the CCP was careful to argue that its policy would bring material benefits, and initially, this proved true. But after one year, incomes fell, and the peasants withdrew support for the communes. The party responded, despite mass objections, by pushing ultra-radical policies; a tragic and avoidable famine ensued.

The CCP would have been overthrown in late 1960 or 1961 if a drastic reversal had not taken place. The fanatics were dismissed, food was forthcoming, humble apologies were made, rural markets were opened up, private plots restored, and the collectives were made smaller and more autonomous. In 1968-70, and briefly in 1975-76, radical policies were trotted out again, causing incomes to drop. And, again, after each push, apologies and concessions were made, and legitimacy was restored.

Today, there are areas in rural China where corruption and inequality are rampant, farm incomes are stagnant, taxes are out of control, and the fabric of the rural community is ripping at the seams. In these areas, one finds open calls of "down with the CCP," physical attacks on officials, vandalism of government offices, and protests. Still, I would guess the CCP enjoys legitimacy in about 70 percent of rural China. Though it certainly has reason for alarm—there are millions of very angry peasants—there are also many villages where the system is working well and meeting expectations.

As Mr. Waldron notes, some observers believe that democracy in China would be disastrous because the ignorant, backward peasants would run the show. This is the opposite of my own view: democracy is not really possible in China, I believe, because the gap in sophistication and resources means that intellectuals, Hong Kong bankers, and the Mercedes-driving Shanghai elite would hold sway in a parliament. Not feeling any historical obligation

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to the peasants, these elites would ignore their interests. The wealthy coastal provinces would come to dominate the other areas, and the current redistribution of wealth for development projects in inland areas would cease. The result would be either misery or another revolution.

Finally, Mr. Waldron is correct to point to the historic similarities between China and India. Both gained independence from foreign overlordship in the 1940's, both were then at similar levels of development, and both have comparable populations and endowments of natural resources. In 1949, the average lifespan in both countries was 35, yet currently it is 71 for China and 65 for India.

It is true that India displays a greater respect for civil rights; but China's pro-peasant dictatorship has advantages too. Even though, at the national level, democracy is infinitely more developed in India, in rural China local democracy is arguably more meaningful. In local elections in India, the land-owning elite dominates village government and village cooperative organizations, steering benefits toward themselves and their friends. This is not the case in most Chinese villages.

Also, whereas in India the treatment of women is appalling—a lack of political rights, the sale of brides, severe physical abuse, prostitution, and frequent kidnapping—the Chinese government uses a certain amount of coercive power to ensure decent treatment for rural women.

BRIAN K. TURNER
Jacksonville, Florida

ARTHUR WALDRON writes:

I thank Brian K. Turner for his most welcome comments. I am reminded of the saying of a Polish professor of economics in the 1970's: "Communism is a system that bravely overcomes problems that would not exist under other systems." We disagree, I think, because Mr. Turner sees the Communist dictatorship as a response to problems of poverty, unequal distribution, cruelty to women, and so forth, while I see it as a primary cause.

Why is China's countryside today still so poor? The answer is: long-standing Communist policies of confiscating rural resources to support urban and heavy industrial development. This answer is at odds with conventional images of the "peasant revolution" in China, but it is nevertheless correct, and it provides the indispensable background for understanding the present situation.

From the 1950's on, Beijing sponsored heavy industrialization and paid for it by using the power of the dictatorship to confiscate food from the countryside. The collectivization campaigns of the early 1950's were not about improving rural life. They were about getting hold of grain—which farmers would not willingly surrender except in exchange for goods they wanted. Since those were unavailable, police power was used to impose plantation-style cultivation and group harvesting, with the harvest—and this is the key point—not taken home by the farmers but rather stored in a locked, party-controlled warehouse from which it could be used to feed factory workers. Farmers were given ration tickets, for which they received as much or as little food as the local authorities chose.

Thus the farmers were systematically impoverished (while, tragically, most of the heavy industrial investment turned into the loss-making state-owned enterprises the government is now trying to unload), and one result, mentioned by Mr. Turner himself, was the catastrophic man-made famine from 1959-62 in which tens of millions died.

Today things are different—but farmers still get the short end of the stick. Central harvesting and central storage of grain were abolished in the 1970's, and the old commune warehouses are now empty. But the rules and the investment flows are still stacked. Though rental and lease of land by individual farmers are now the rule, they cannot *own* land and are thus without the opportunity to build up a family farm. Contrary to what Mr. Turner says, rural industry is also weak, and rural banks mostly insolvent (along with the rest of China's banking system), credit overwhelmingly going to the pet projects of the leadership (the Three Gorges dam, showplace urban developments like Shanghai's Pudong district, weapons purchases, and so forth). Thus the rural-urban gap grows. Tens of millions of poor farm families have migrated to the big cities, where they have no legal status and no rights but find plenty of work and a better standard of living. From among those landless migrants come the vast majority of victims of the crimes of kidnapping, sale of women, forced prostitution, and the like.

Despite all this, things are undoubtedly better today than they were twenty years ago, even for poor farmers. The party has made some changes that have helped—though often the change was as simple as reversing the policy that had created the problem initially. But there is one big change it refuses to make—to let the farmers, the urban poor, and everyone else in China participate in decision-making through democracy.

Mr. Turner argues that democracy would mean "intellectuals, Hong Kong bankers, and the Mercedes-driving Shanghai elite" holding sway in a parliament. I see things the other way around. Today the people Mr. Turner is talking about already dominate government: Jiang Zemin and his Shanghai faction run the Chinese government for their own interests; the earlier elite, around Mao, did the same, from (relatively) prosperous Beijing, which they rarely left. The problem originated with the dictatorship and can only be ended through democratic elections that will, given the size of the rural population, put into parliament a powerful majority beholden to rural voters. Indian politicians regularly visit the most remote areas, not (like Chinese officials) to "inspect," but to ask for votes. This makes all the difference.

It seems to me that Mr. Turner concedes this point when he notes that the great famine was caused by insane agricultural policies, pushed by the party "despite mass objections." Would he agree that few if any of those tens of millions of farmers would have starved to death had they been voters? To me the lesson is clear.

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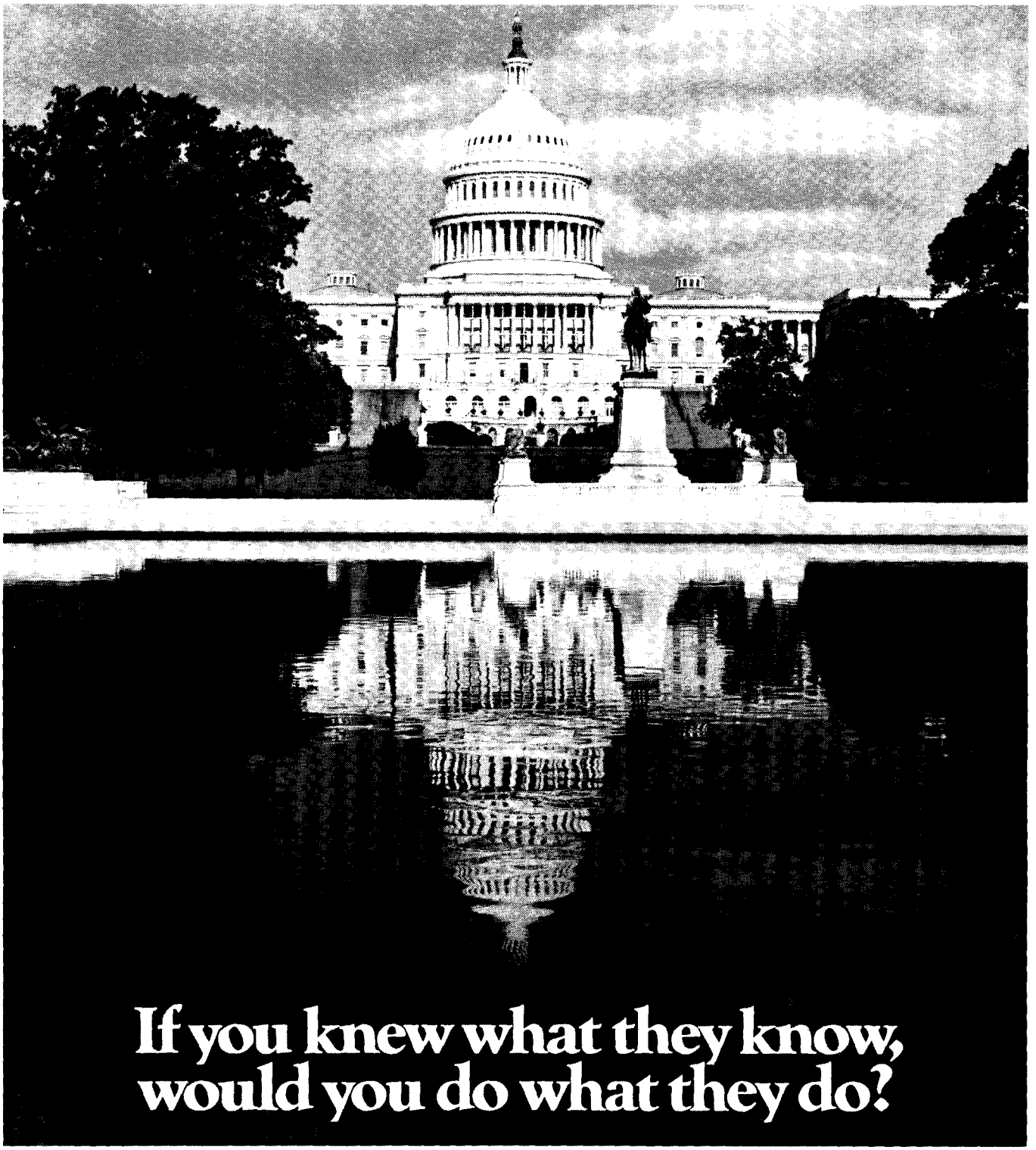

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Commentary
April 2001

What Brings a World into Being?

David Berlinski

SINCE THEIR inception in the 17th century, the modern sciences have been given over to a majestic vision: there is nothing in nature but atoms and the void. This is hardly a new thought, of course; in the ancient world, it received its most memorable expression in Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*. But it has been given contemporary resonance in theories—like general relativity and quantum mechanics—of terrifying (and inexplicable) power. If brought to a successful conclusion, the trajectory of this search would yield a single theory that would subsume all other theories and, in its scope and purity, would be our only necessary intellectual edifice.

In science, as in politics, the imperial destiny drives hard. If the effort to subordinate all aspects of experience to a single set of *laws* has often proved inconclusive, the scientific enterprise has also been involved in the search for universal *ideas*. One such idea is information.

Like energy, indeed, information has become ubiquitous as a commodity and, like energy, inescapable as an idea. The thesis that the human mind is nothing more than an information-processing device is now widely regarded as a fact. "Viewed at the most abstract level," the science writer George Johnson remarked recently in the *New York Times*, "both brains and computers operate *the same way* by translating phenomena—sounds, images, and so forth—into a code that can be stored and manipulated" (emphasis added). More generally, the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has argued that life is itself fundamentally a river of information, an idea that has in large part also motivated the successful effort to decipher the human genome. Information is even said to encompass the elementary particles. "All the quarks and electrons in the cosmic wilds," Johnson writes, "are exchanging information each time they interact."

These assertions convey a current of intellectual optimism that it would be foolish to dismiss. Surely an idea capable of engaging so many distinct experiences must be immensely attractive. But it seems only yesterday that other compelling ideas urged their claims: chaos and nonlinear dynamics, catastrophe theory, game theory, evolutionary entropy, and various notions of complexity and self-organization.

The history of science resembles a collection of ghosts remembering that once they too were gods. With respect to information, a note of caution may well be in order if only because a note of caution is always in order.

II

IF INFORMATION casts a cold white light on the workings of the mind in general, it should certainly shed a little on the workings of language in particular.

DAVID BERLINSKI *is the author of* A Tour of the Calculus, The Advent of the Algorithm, *and, most recently,* Newton's Gift (*Free Press*). *His articles in* COMMENTARY *include "Was There a Big Bang?" (February 1998) and "The Deniable Darwin" (June 1996).*

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The words and sentences of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, to take a suggestive example, have the power to bring a world into being. The beginning of the process is in plain sight. There are words on the printed page, and they make up a discrete, one-dimensional, linear progression. Discrete—there are no words between words (as there are fractions between fractions); one-dimensional—each word might well be specified by a single number; linear—as far as words go, it is one thing after another. The end of the process is in sight as well: a richly organized, continuous, three- (or four-) dimensional universe. Although that universe is imaginary, it is recognizably contiguous to our own.

Bringing a world into being is an act of creation. But bringing a world into being is also an activity that suggests, from the point of view of the sciences, that immemorial progression in which causes evoke various effects: connections achieved between material objects, or between the grand mathematical abstractions necessary to explain their behavior.

And therein lies a problem. Words are, indeed, material objects, or linked as abstractions to material objects. And as material objects, they have an inherent power to influence other material objects. But no informal account of what words do as material objects seems quite sufficient to explain what they do in provoking certain experiences and so in creating certain worlds.

In the case of *Moby-Dick*, the chemical composition of words on the printed page, their refractive index, their weight, their mass, and ultimately their nature as a swarm of elementary particles—all this surely plays *some* role in getting the reader sympathetically to see Captain Ahab and imaginatively suffer his fate. The relevant causal pathways pass from the printed ink to our eyes, a river of light then serving to staple the shape of various words to our tingling retinal nerves; thereafter our nervous system obligingly passes on those shapes in the form of various complicated electrical signals. This is completely a physical process, one that begins with physical causes and ends with physical effects.

And yet the experience of reading begins where those physical effects end. It is, after all, an experience, and the world that it reveals is imaginary. If purely physical causes are capable of creating imaginary worlds, it is not by means of any modality known to the physical sciences.

Just how *do* one set of discrete objects, subject to the constraints of a single dimension, give rise to a universe organized in completely different ways and according to completely different principles?

IT IS here that information makes its entrance. The human brain, the linguist Steven Pinker has argued in *How the Mind Works*, is a physical object existing among other physical objects. Ordinary causes in the world at large evoke their ordinary effects within the brain's complicated folds and creases. But the brain is, *also*, an information-processing device, an instrument designed by evolution for higher things.

It is the brain's capacity to process information that, writes Pinker, allows human beings to "see, think, feel, choose, and act." Reading is a special case of seeing, one in which information radiates from the printed page and thereafter transforms itself variously into various worlds.

So much for what information does—clearly, almost everything of interest. But what is it, and how does it manage to do what it does? Pinker's definition, although informal, is brisk and to the point. Information, he writes, "is a correlation between two things that is produced by a lawful process." Circles in a tree stump carry information about the tree's age; lines in the human face carry information about the injuries of time.

Words on the page also contain or express information, and as carriers of information they convey the stuff from one place to another, piggy-backed, as it were, on a stream of physical causes and their effects.

Why not? The digital computer is a device that brilliantly compels a variety of discrete artifacts to scuttle along various causal pathways, ultimately exploiting pulsed signals in order to get one thing to act upon another. But in addition to their physical properties, the symbols flawlessly manipulated by a digital computer are capable of carrying and so conveying information, transforming one information-rich stream, such as a data base of proper names, into another information-rich stream, such as those same names arranged in alphabetical order.

The human mind does as much, Pinker argues; indeed, what it does, it does in the same way. Just as the computer transforms one information stream into another, the human mind transforms one source of information—words on the printed page—into another—a world in which whalers pursue whales and the fog lowers itself ominously over the spreading sea.

Thus Pinker; thus almost everyone.

THE THEORY that gives the concept of information almost all of its content was created by the late mathematician Claude Shannon in 1948 and 1949. In it, the rich variety of human intercourse dwindles and disappears, replaced by an ide-

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alized system in which an information *source* sends signals to an information *sink* by means of a communication channel (such as a telephone line).

Communication, Shannon realized, gains traction on the real world by means of the firing pistons of tension and release. From far away, where the system has its source, messages are selected and then sent, one after the other—perhaps by means of binary digits. In the simplest possible set-up, symbols are limited to a single digit: *1*, say. A binary digit may occupy one of two states (*on* or *off*). We who are tensed at the system's sink are uncertain whether *1* will erupt into phosphorescent life or the screen will remain blank. Let us assume that each outcome is equally likely. The signal is sent—and then received. Uncertainty collapses into blessed relief, the binary digit *1* emerging in a swarm of pixels. The exercise has conveyed one unit, or bit, of information. And with the definition of a unit in place, information has been added to the list of properties that are interesting because they are *measurable*.

The development of Shannon's theory proceeds toward certain deep theorems about coding channels, noise, and error-reduction. But the details pertinent to this discussion proceed in another direction altogether, where they promptly encounter a roadblock.

"Frequently," Shannon observes, "messages have *meaning*: that is, they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities." Indeed. Witness *Moby-Dick*, which is *about* a large white whale. For Shannon, however, these "semantic aspects of communication" take place in some other room, not the one where his theory holds court; they are, he writes with a touch of asperity, "irrelevant to the engineering problem." The significance of communication lies only with the fact that "the actual message is one selected from a set of possible messages"—*this* signal, and not some other.

Shannon's strictures are crucial. They have, however, frequently proved difficult to grasp. Thus, in explaining Shannon's theory, Richard Dawkins writes that "the sentence, 'It rained in Oxford every day this week,' carries relatively little information, because the receiver is not surprised by it. On the other hand, 'It rained in the Sahara every day this week' would be a message with high information content, well worth paying extra to send."

But this is to confuse a signal with what it signifies. Whether I am surprised by the sentence "It rained in the Sahara desert every day this week" depends only on my assessment of the source sending the signal. Shannon's theory makes no judgments whatsoever about the subjects treated by various signals and so establishes no connection whatsoever to events in the real world. It is entirely possible that whatever the weather in Oxford *or* the Sahara may be, a given source might send both sentences with equal probability. In that case, they would convey precisely the same information.

The roadblock now comes into view. Under ordinary circumstances, reading serves the end of placing one man's thoughts in contact with another man's mind. On being told that whales are not fish, Melville's readers have learned something *about* whales and so about fish. Their uncertainty, and so their intellectual tension, has its antecedent roots in facts about the world beyond the symbols they habitually encounter. For most English speakers, the Japanese translation of *Moby-Dick*, although conveying precisely the same information as the English version, remains unreadable and thus unavailing as a guide to the universe created by the book in English.

What we who have conceived an interest in reading have required is some idea of how the words and sentences of *Moby-Dick* compel a world into creation. And about this, Shannon's theory says nothing.

For readers, it is the connections that are crucial, for it is those connections themselves—the specific correlations between the words in Melville's novel and the world of large fish and demented whalers—that function as the load-bearing structures. Just how, then, *are* such connections established?

Apparently they just are.

III

If, in reading, every reader embodies a paradox, it is a paradox that in living he exemplifies as well. "Next to the brain," George Johnson remarks, "the most obvious biological information-processor is the genetic machinery of the cell."

The essential narrative is by now familiar. All living creatures divide themselves into their material constituents *and* an animating system of instruction and information. The plan is in effect wherever life is in command: both the reader and the bacterial cell are expressions of an ancestral text, their brief appearance on the stage serving in the grand scheme of things simply to convey its throbbing voice from one generation to another.

Within the compass of the cell itself, there are two molecular classes: the proteins, and the nucle-

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ic acids (DNA and RNA). Proteins have a precise three-dimensional shape, and resemble tight tensed knots. Their essential structure is nonetheless linear; when denatured and then stretched, the complicated jumble of a functional protein gracefully reveals a single filament, a kind of strand, punctuated by various amino acids, one after another.

DNA, on the other hand, is a double-stranded molecule, the two strands turned as a helix. Within the cell, DNA is wound in spools and so has its own complicated three-dimensional shape; but like the proteins, it also has an essentially linear nature. The elementary constituents of DNA are the four nucleotides, abbreviated as A, C, G, and T. The two strands of DNA are fastened to one another by means of struts, almost as if the strands were separate halves of a single ladder, and the struts gain purchase on these strands by virtue of the fact that certain nucleotides are attracted to one another by means of chemical affinities.

The structure of DNA as a double helix endows one molecule with two secrets. In replicating itself, the cell cleaves its double-stranded DNA. Each strand then reconstitutes itself by means of the same chemical affinities that held together the original strands. When replication has been concluded, there are two double-stranded DNA molecules where formerly there was only one, thus allowing life on the cellular level to pass from one generation to the next.

But if DNA is inherently capable of reproducing itself, it is also inherently capable of conveying the linear order of its nucleotides to the cell's amino acids. In these respects, DNA functions as a template or pattern. The mechanism is astonishingly complex, requiring intermediaries and a host of specialized enzymes to act in concert. But whatever the details, the central dogma of molecular biology is straight as an arrow. The order of nucleotides within DNA is read by the cell and then expressed in its proteins.

Read by the cell? Apparently so. The metaphor is inescapable, and so hardly a metaphor. As the DNA is read, proteins form in its wake, charged with carrying on the turbulent affairs of the cell itself. It was an imaginary reader, nose deep in Melville's great novel, who suggested the distinction between what words do as material causes and what they achieve as symbols. The same distinction recurs in biology. Like words upon the printed page, DNA functions in any number of causal pathways, the tic of its triplets inducing certain biochemical changes and suppressing others.

And this prompts what lawyers call a leading question. We quite know what DNA is: it is a macromolecule and so a material object. We quite know what it achieves: apparently everything. Are the two sides of this equation in balance?

The cell is, after all, a living system. It partakes of all the mysteries of life. The bacterium *escherichia coli*, for example, contains roughly 2,000 separate proteins, and every one of them is mad with purpose and busy beyond belief. Eucaryotic cells, which contain a nucleus, are more complicated still. Chemicals cross the cell membrane on a tight schedule, consult with other chemicals, undertake their work, and are then capped in cylinders, degraded and unceremoniously ejected from the cell. Dozens of separate biochemical systems act independently, their coordination finely orchestrated by various signaling systems. Enzymes prompt chemical reactions to commence and, work done, cause them to stop as well. The cell moves forward in time, functional in its nature, continuous in its operations.

Explaining all this by appealing to the causal powers of a single molecule involves a disturbing division of attention, rather as if a cathedral were seen suddenly to rise from the head of a carrot. Nonetheless, many biologists, on seeing the carrot, are persuaded that they *can* discern the steps leading to the cathedral. Their claim is often presented as a fact in the textbooks. The difficulty is just that, while the carrot—DNA, when all is said and done—remains in plain sight, subsequent steps leading to the cathedral would seem either to empty in a computational wilderness or to gutter out in an endless series of inconclusive causal pathways.

FIRST, THE computational wilderness. Proteins appear in living systems in a variety of three-dimensional shapes. Their configuration is crucial to their function and so to the role they play in the cell. The beginning of a causal process is once again in plain sight—the linear order expressed by a protein's amino acids. And so, too, is the end—a specific three-dimensional shape. It is the mechanism in the middle that is baffling.

Within the cell, most proteins fold themselves into their proper configuration within seconds. Folding commences as the protein itself is being formed, the head of an amino-acid chain apparently knowing its own tail. Some proteins fold entirely on their own; others require molecular chaperones to block certain intermediate configurations and encourage others. Just how a protein manages

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to organize itself in space, using only the sequence of its own amino acids, remains a mystery, perhaps the deepest in computational biology.

Mathematicians and computer scientists have endeavored to develop powerful algorithms in order to predict the three-dimensional configuration of a given protein. The most successful of these algorithms gobble the computer's time and waste prodigally its power. To little effect. Protein-folding remains a mystery.

Just recently, IBM announced the formation of a new division, intended to supply computational assistance to the biological community. A supercomputer named Blue Gene is under development. Operating at processing speeds 100 times faster than existing supercomputers, the monster will be dedicated largely to the problem of protein folding.

The size of the project is a nice measure of the depth of our ignorance. The slime mold has been slithering since time immemorial, its proteins folding themselves for just as long. No one believes that the slime mold accomplishes this by means of supercomputing firepower. The cell is not obviously an algorithm, and a simulation, needless to say, is not obviously an explanation. Whatever else the cell may be doing, it is not using Monte Carlo methods or consulting genetic algorithms in order to fold its proteins into their proper shape. The requisite steps are chemical. No other causal modality is available to the cell.

If these chemical steps were understood, simulations would be easy to execute. The scope of the research efforts devoted to simulation suggest that the opposite is the case: simulations are difficult to achieve, and the requisite chemical steps are poorly understood.

If computations are for the moment intractable, every analysis of the relevant causal pathways is for the moment inconclusive.

As they are unfolding, proteins trigger an "unfolding protein response," one that alerts an "intracellular signaling system" of things to come. It is this system that in turn "senses" when unfolded proteins accumulate. The signal sent, the signaling system responds by activating the transcription of still other genes that provide assistance to the protein struggling to find its correct three-dimensional shape. Each step in the causal analysis suggests another to come.

But no matter the causal pathways initiated by DNA, some *overall* feature of living systems seems stubbornly to lie beyond their reach. Signaling systems must themselves be regulated, their activities timed. If unfolding proteins require chaperones, these must make their appearance in the proper place; their formation requires energy, and so, too, do their degradation and ejection from the cell. Like the organism of which it is a part, the cell has striking global properties. It is *alive*.

Our own experience with complex dynamical systems, such as armies in action (or integrated microchips), suggests that in this regard command and coordination are crucial. The cell requires what one biologist has called a "supreme controlling and coordinating power." But if there is such a supreme system, biologists have not found it. The analysis of living systems is, to be sure, a science still in its infancy. My point, however, is otherwise, and it is general.

Considered strictly as a material object, DNA falls under the descriptive powers of biochemistry, its causal pathways bounded by chemical principles. Chemical actions are combinatorial in nature, and *local* in their effect. Chemicals affect chemicals within the cell by means of various weak affinities. There is no action at a distance. The various chemical affinities are essentially arrangements in which molecules exchange their parts irenically or like seaweed fronds drift close and then hold fast.

But command, control, and coordination, if achieved by the cell, would represent a phenomenon incompatible with its chemical activities. A "supreme controlling and coordinating power" would require a device receiving signals from every part of the cell and sending its own universally understood signals in turn. It would require, as well, a universal clock, one that keeps time globally, and a universal memory, one that operates throughout the cell. There is no trace of these items within the cell.

Absent these items, it follows that the cell quite plainly has the ability to organize itself *from itself*, its constituents bringing order out of chaos on their own, like a very intricate ballet achieved without a choreographer. And what holds for the cell must hold as well for the creatures of which cells are a part. One biologist has chosen to explain a mystery by describing it as a fact. "Organisms," he writes, "from daisies to humans, are naturally endowed with a remarkable property, an ability to *make themselves*."

Naturally endowed?

Just recently, the biologist Evelyn Fox Keller has tentatively endorsed this view. The system of control and coordination that animates the cell, she observes in *The Century of the Gene*, "consists of, and lives in, the interactive complex made up of genom-

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ic structures and the vast network of cellular machinery in which those structures are embedded." This may well be so. It is also unprecedented in our experience.

We have no insight into such systems. No mathematical theory predicts their existence or explains their properties. How, then, *do* a variety of purely local chemical reactions manage to achieve an overall and global mode of functioning?

INFORMATION NOW makes its second appearance as an analytic tool. DNA is a molecule—that much is certain. But it is also, molecular biologists often affirm, a library, a blueprint, a code, a program, or an algorithm, and as such it is quivering with information that it is just dying to be put to good use. As a molecule, DNA does what molecules do; but in its secondary incarnation as *something else*, DNA achieves command of the cell and controls its development.

A dialogue first encountered on the level of matter (DNA as a molecule and nothing more) now reappears on the level of metaphor (DNA as an information source). Once again we know what DNA is like, and we know what it does: apparently everything. And the question recurs: are the sides of this equation in balance?

Unfortunately, we do not know and cannot tell.

Richard Dawkins illustrates what is at issue by means of a thought experiment. "We have an intuitive sense," he writes,

> that a lobster, say, is more complex (more "advanced," some might even say more "highly evolved") than another animal, perhaps a millipede. Can we *measure* something in order to confirm or deny our intuition? Without literally turning it into bits, we can make an approximate estimation of the *information contents* [emphasis added] of the two bodies as follows. Imagine writing a book describing the lobster. Now write another book describing the millipede down to the same level of detail. Divide the word-count in one book by the word-count in the other, and you have an approximate estimate of the relative information content of lobster and millipede.

These statements have the happy effect of enforcing an impression of quantitative discipline on what until now have been a series of disorderly concepts. Things are being measured, and that is always a good sign. The comparison of one book to another makes sense, of course. Books are made up of words the way computer programs are made up of binary digits, and words and binary digits may both be counted.

It is the connection outward, from these books or programs to the creatures they describe, that remains problematic. What level of detail is required? In the case of a lobster, a very short book comprising the words "Yo, a lobster" is clearly not what Dawkins has in mind. But adding detail to a description—and thus length—is an exercise without end; descriptions by their very nature form an infinitely descending series.

Information is entirely a static concept, and we know of no laws of nature that would tie it to other quantitative properties. Still, if we cannot answer the question precisely, then perhaps it might be answered partially by saying that we have reached the right level of descriptive detail when the information in the book—that is, the lobster's DNA—is roughly of the same order of magnitude as the information latent in everything that a lobster is and does. This would at least tell us that the job at hand—constructing a lobster—is doable insofar as information plays a role in getting *any*thing done.

Some biologists, including John Maynard Smith, have indeed argued that the information latent in a lobster's DNA *must* be commensurate with the information latent in the lobster itself. How otherwise could the lobster get on with the business at hand? But this easy response assumes precisely what is at issue, namely that it is *by means of information* that the lobster gets going in the first place. Skeptics such as ourselves require a direct measurement, a comparison between the information resident in the lobster's DNA and the information resident in the lobster itself. Nothing less will do.

DNA is a linear string. So far, so good. And strings are well-defined objects. There is thus no problem in principle in measuring their information. It is there for the asking and reckoned in bits. But what on earth is one to count in the case of the lobster? A lobster is not discrete; it is not made of linear symbols; and it occupies three or four dimensions and not one. Two measurements are thus needed, but only one is obviously forthcoming.

The unhappy fact is that we have in general no noncircular way of specifying the information in any three- (or four-) dimensional object except by an appeal to the information by which it is generated. But this appeal makes literal sense only when strings or items like strings are in concourse. The request for a direct comparison between what the lobster has to go on—its DNA—and what it is—a living lobster—ends with only one measurement in place, the other left dangling like a mountain climber's rope.

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We are thus returned to our original question: how do symbols—words, strings, DNA—bring a world into being?

Apparently they just do.

IV

One might hope that in one discipline, at least, the situation might be different. Within the austere confines of mathematical physics, where a few pregnant symbols command the flux of space and time, information as an idea might come into its own at last.

The laws of physics have a peculiar role to play in the economy of the sciences, one that goes beyond anything observed in psychology or biology. They lie at the bottom of the grand scheme, comprising principles that are not only fundamental but irreducible. They must provide an explanation for the behavior of matter in all of its modes, and so they must explain the *emergence* as well as the organization of material objects. If not, then plainly they would not explain the behavior of matter in all of its modes, and, in particular, they would not explain its *existence*.

This requirement has initiated a curious contemporary exercise. Current cosmology suggests that the universe began with a big bang, erupting from nothing whatsoever 15 billion years ago. Plainly, the creation of something from nothing cannot be explained in terms of the behavior of material objects. This circumstance has prompted some physicists to assign a causative role to the laws of physics *themselves*.

The inference, indeed, is inescapable. For what else is there? "It is hard to resist the impression," writes the physicist Paul Davies, "of something—some influence capable of transcending space-time and the confinements of relativistic causality—possessing an overview of the entire cosmos at the instant of its creation, and manipulating all the causally disconnected parts to go bang with almost exactly the same vigor at the same time."

More than one philosopher has drawn a correlative conclusion: that, in this regard, the fundamental laws of physics enjoy attributes traditionally assigned to a deity. They are, in the words of Mary Hesse, "universal and eternal, comprehensive without exception (omnipotent), independent of knowledge (absolute), and encompassing all possible knowledge (omniscient)."

If *this* is so, the fundamental laws of physics cannot themselves be construed in material terms. They lie beyond the system of causal influences that they explain. And in this sense, the information resident in those causal laws is richer—it is more abundant—than the information resident in the universe itself. Having composed one book describing the universe to the last detail, a physicist, on subtracting that book from the fundamental laws of physics, would rest with a positive remainder, the additional information being whatever is needed to bring the universe into existence.

We are now at the very limits of the plausible. Contemporary cosmology is a subject as speculative as scholastic theology, and physicists who find themselves irresistibly drawn to the very largest of its intellectual issues are ruefully aware that they have disengaged themselves from any evidential tether, however loose. Nevertheless, these flights of fancy serve a very useful purpose. In the image of the laws of nature zestfully wrestling a universe into existence, one sees a peculiarly naked form of information—naked because it has been severed from every possibility of a material connection. Stripped of its connection to a world that does not yet exist, the information latent in the laws of physics is nonetheless capable of *doing* something, by bringing the universe into being.

A novel brings a world into creation; a complicated molecule an organism. But these are the low taverns of thought. It is only when information is assigned the power to bring something into existence from *nothing whatsoever* that its essentially magical nature is revealed. And contemplating magic on this scale prompts a final question. Just how did the information latent in the fundamental laws of physics unfold itself to become a world?

Apparently it just did.

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The "Diversity" Defense

Jason L. Riley

The 1990's were not especially kind to the supporters of affirmative action in higher education. Although neither Congress nor the two successive occupants of the White House saw fit to take a stand against the increased entrenchment of racial preferences in our universities, some states and courts did. In 1996, the voters of California gave their approval to Proposition 209, which prohibited the state from using race as a factor in, among other things, the admissions process of the vast University of California system. The state of Washington followed suit two years later, and in 1999 Florida put an end to race-based programs at the state's ten public universities.

A greater blow still was the 1996 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in the case of *Hopwood* v. *State of Texas*. Scrutinizing affirmative action in higher education more closely than the federal judiciary had done for decades, the court overturned the admissions procedures of the University of Texas law school, which had systematically applied lower standards to black and Hispanic candidates than to whites. According to the Fifth Circuit, such disparate treatment was a gross violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws"—a ruling whose logic, if embraced by the Supreme Court, would effectively call a halt to preferential quotas at public universities.

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Not that *Hopwood* went unchallenged, or that its intent has been fully carried out even in the states under the Fifth Circuit's jurisdiction. Both there and in other places where the public or the judicial system has voiced its disapproval of quotas, procedures have been put in place to circumvent or otherwise mitigate the consequences. As a recent survey by the Center for Equal Opportunity shows, preferential quotas continue to "run high and deep throughout public education."

In most such schemes, however, the goal itself has been redefined. No longer do college administrators and other affirmative-action advocates speak, as they once did, about the need to overcome a legacy of past discrimination or to achieve social justice. In seeking to justify race-based admissions programs, they now speak, rather, of a purely *educational* purpose: namely, "diversity."

It was thus with an audible sigh of relief that the affirmative-action lobby received the news this past December of a court decision favorable to its cause. In a ruling clearly meant as a counterweight to *Hopwood*, and based on the grounds, precisely, of "diversity," a federal judge in Detroit found the University of Michigan's system of admitting white and minority applicants under different criteria to be constitutionally sound. If the far-reaching decision in the case of *Gratz* v. *Bollinger* is upheld (it is now on appeal), the day may never arrive when affirmative action—a program once considered temporary even by its most ardent proponents—will finally come to an end.

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The "diversity" rationale did not come from nowhere. As with much else in the controversy over affirmative action in higher education, the inevitable starting point is the Supreme Court's historic ruling in the 1978 case of *Regents of the University of California* v. *Bakke*.

In 1972, a white man named Allan Bakke had applied for admission to the medical school of the University of California at Davis and been rejected. A year later, he applied again and was once more denied admission. Upon learning that sixteen of the 100 places in the class had been reserved each year for minority applicants, Bakke, whose academic record and test scores were better than those of nearly every admitted minority student, sued the medical school, charging racial discrimination.

In what ranks as one of the most splintered decisions ever rendered by the Supreme Court, the Justices in *Bakke* issued six separate opinions, none of which commanded a majority. On the basic matter before the Court, four Justices—William Rehnquist, John Paul Stevens, Potter Stewart, and Chief Justice Warren Burger—ruled that the two-tiered admissions program at the UC-Davis medical school was unconstitutional, while four others—Harry Blackmun, William Brennan, Thurgood Marshall, and Byron White—wanted to uphold it. Resolution of the case thus depended on the swing vote of Justice Lewis Powell.

In his own notoriously indecisive opinion, Powell found common ground with both sides. The admissions program at the UC-Davis medical school was, he agreed, plainly illegal, and had done an injustice to Allan Bakke. Though racial classifications were perhaps permissible in individual cases as a remedy for documentable discrimination, they could not be justified as an instrument for overcoming the effects of "societal" discrimination, "an amorphous concept of injury that may be ageless in its reach into the past." "Preferring members of one group for no reason other than race or ethnic origin," Powell wrote, "is discrimination for its own sake. This the Constitution forbids."

At the same time, however, Powell endorsed the idea that colleges *could* take race into account in their admissions decisions without running afoul of the Constitution. The key, as he saw it, citing procedures then in use at Harvard College, was not to assign an inordinate weight to race or ethnicity but rather to treat them as modest "plus" factors, like having extraordinary leadership qualities or coming from an underrepresented region of the country. In selecting their students, universities had the right to consider such things because doing so furthered what was, to Powell's mind, an invaluable educational good: diversity. As he explained, "People do not learn very much when they are surrounded only by the likes of themselves."

For more than two decades, Justice Powell's attempt to split the difference in *Bakke* has been the only road map available to college administrators—and it has given them abundant room to maneuver. "The decision may have been a statesmanlike piece of jurisprudence," wrote the journalist Nicholas Lemann, a defender of affirmative action, in 1995, "but in admissions-office circles it is widely viewed as meaning that it's O.K. to reverse-discriminate"—that is, to discriminate in favor of minority candidates—"as long as you're not really obvious about it."

At most selective public universities in the wake of *Bakke*, the need to keep reverse discrimination from being "really obvious" translated into an effort to keep it under wraps. This meant, above all, not releasing potentially embarrassing information about how admissions decisions were actually being made.

This is how it was, too, at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. There, not only were white and nonwhite applicants evaluated according to vastly different criteria, but, in contravention of the constitutional principle enunciated by Powell himself, a specific number of admission slots were set aside for minorities. But then, as Lemann recently related in the *New Yorker*, the facts were uncovered and documented in the mid-1990's by Carl Cohen, a professor of philosophy at the university and (as readers of Commentary have reason to know) a long-time foe of racial preferences.

Thanks to the efforts of Cohen and others, Michigan was forced to revamp its admissions procedures. In 1998, the school introduced a new system, still in use today, under which all applicants would be evaluated on a single 150-point scale—a scale, however, on which blacks and Hispanics would be automatically awarded an extra 20 points. Both sets of admissions procedures, the old and the new, were the target of the suit brought in 1997 by Jennifer Gratz and Patrick Hamacher, two white applicants who had been rejected by the Ann Arbor campus in favor, they argued, of less qualified minority students.

In deciding the case of *Gratz* v. *Bollinger* (Lee Bollinger being the president of the University of Michigan), Judge Patrick J. Duggan of the federal district court emphasized that his guiding light was

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Justice Powell's opinion in *Bakke*. This meant, in the first place, that the dual-track admissions program in use at Michigan when Gratz and Hamacher applied—in 1995 and 1997, respectively—did not pass constitutional muster. Reserving a set number of places for minorities, Duggan declared, was just the kind of invidious racial classification that Allan Bakke had confronted, and that the Supreme Court, with Powell's deciding vote, had struck down.

But the *current* admissions guidelines at Michigan were another matter altogether. These, Judge Duggan averred, not only embodied the sort of nuanced treatment of minority applicants that Powell had outlined, but they did so in the service of the very goal about which Powell had spoken with such evident enthusiasm. As Duggan himself put it, having a "racially and ethnically diverse student body produces significant educational benefits," and thus "constitutes a compelling government interest."

Nor did Judge Duggan simply assert the existence of these "significant educational benefits." His claim was supported, he wrote, by "solid evidence," in particular the research conducted at the University of Michigan's request by Patricia Gurin of the school's psychology department. According to Gurin's report, which Judge Duggan cited at length, a racially diverse campus was essential to achieving a range of important educational goals. It led students to "learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways"; it made them better able to understand "multiple perspectives" and less subject to "a problem termed 'group think,'" in which "group members mindlessly conform"; and, finally, it allowed them to "appreciate the common values and integrative forces that harness differences in pursuit of common ground."

For the friends of racial preferences in higher education, the importance of these claims cannot be exaggerated. After all, if preferences do serve an abiding educational purpose rather than just a remedial one—if, that is, they benefit *all* students rather than just aggrieved minorities—the country's public universities may at long last win a reprieve from the hostile attention of the courts and, more important, a free hand in determining the racial composition of their student bodies.

IS THERE, then, "solid evidence" of diversity's benefits? Take, to begin with, the report of the psychologist Patricia Gurin that was so impressive to Judge Duggan. As was pointed out in an *amicus* brief filed on behalf of the plaintiffs by the National Association of Scholars, Gurin's research is hardly a model of rigorous social science. Nowhere, for instance, does she provide a direct measure of the racial make-up of the universities in her analysis. Rather, she simply assumes that a school has grown more diverse if, over time, it has offered more courses in racial and ethnic studies.

What exactly this index of diversity is supposed to tell us is far from clear. At what level of racially mixed attendance do classes like "Introduction to Afro-American Studies" or "Chicana Literature" become sufficiently diverse to satisfy the criterion of diversity? And if such courses are attended only by blacks and Hispanics, can they still be said to contribute to the goal of imparting "multiple perspectives" to all students on campus? And what does the mere existence of such courses have to do with what actually happens in them? Gurin either does not know or cannot say—a serious shortcoming, one would think, in research purporting to show the benefits of racial preferences in creating diversity.

Still less persuasive is Gurin's claim that diversity, as defined by the presence of such classes, serves important educational ends. For this finding, it turns out, she relied not on independent assessments but, for the most part, on students' self-evaluations. Thus, it was the students themselves who concluded that their coursework in racial and ethnic studies had made them—in the vacuous and inimitable slogans of multiculturalism—"think in deeper, more complex ways" and learn to "harness [their] differences." Others may question whether this represents, as Gurin claims, an antidote to the problem of "group think," or is rather an example of it.

For evidence that the latter may be the case, one need look no further than a recent collection of "diary-like" essays by students at the law school of the University of California at Berkeley.* Asked to rate the health of the marketplace of ideas at their multicultural law school, many of them readily testified, in the words of the book's editor, that "race serves as a proxy for opinion," and that diversity at the Berkeley law school "is defined according to skin color rather than according to ideas."

Perhaps even more to the point, and tragically so in light of the educational deficiencies that affirmative action often serves to mask, Gurin's report failed to show—and, indeed, seemed uninterested in finding—any link between diversity and such traditional measures of academic achievement as improved grades, test scores, and graduation rates. The existence of just such a link was, as it happens,

* *The Diversity Hoax*, edited by David Wiener. Foundation for Academic Standards & Tradition, 184 pp., $12.95 (paper).

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a chief claim of William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, former presidents respectively of Princeton and Harvard, in their 1998 book, *The Shape of the River*, where it is cited as one of the justifications for continued adherence to racial preferences.

Bowen and Bok said they saw nothing "disappointing" in the graduation rates of the beneficiaries of affirmative action. But in order to arrive at this conclusion, as Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom demonstrated in a scathing review-article in Commentary, they had to overlook the alarmingly high *drop-out* rate of students admitted under preferential quotas (for blacks at elite schools, 3.3 times the white rate), and they also methodically downplayed the no less alarming statistics on actual classroom performance. Finally, on the related issue of whether, as advertised, diversity furthers interracial friendships, it turns out according to the Thernstroms that the incidence of such friendships on our nation's race-conscious campuses lags far *behind* the norm for American society as a whole.*

As for the constitutional issues at stake in *Gratz*, Judge Duggan was surely too quick to conclude that Justice Powell would have come down in favor of the system now in use at the University of Michigan. A scale that awards bonus points to black and Hispanic applicants may be more subtle than a grid that simply sets them apart for separate consideration, but both provide a significant advantage on the basis of nothing other than surname and skin color. In the admissions process at Michigan, being a member of a minority group remains a good deal more than a modest "plus" factor.

More fundamentally, though, it is wholly unclear that Powell's endorsement of diversity as a justification for affirmative action deserves to carry *any* legal weight. Indeed, a principal conclusion of the Fifth Circuit's ruling in *Hopwood* in 1996 was that it does not. As that court noted, though Powell may have sympathized (to a degree) with the four Justices who wanted to uphold racial preferences, those same four Justices, for their part, declined to support *his* view of diversity; and so, of course, did the four Justices who voted to strike down the program at UC-Davis. What this means, as Carl Cohen noted in these pages shortly after the ruling in *Hopwood*, is that Powell's opinion "cannot bind lower courts, and may not be supposed to lay down the constitutional rules governing the way race can be used."†

Indeed, the *Hopwood* judges made short work of the arguments so uncritically embraced by Duggan. The Supreme Court, they pointed out, has consistently held that race-based programs are acceptable only as a narrowly tailored remedy for the documented effects of discrimination. Diversity in higher education, by contrast, was not nearly so compelling a government interest; to the contrary, it raised troubling constitutional questions of its own. As the *Hopwood* court tartly observed:

> [T]he use of race in admissions for diversity in higher education contradicts, rather than furthers, the aims of equal protection. Diversity fosters, rather than minimizes, the use of race. It treats minorities as a group, rather than as individuals. It . . . may promote improper racial stereotypes, thus fueling racial hostility.

Moreover, the court in *Hopwood* understood that the effects of race-conscious admissions extend far beyond the campus gates. The pursuit of diversity for its own sake encourages Americans to use race as a stand-in for an individual's experiences, ideas, and outlook, sanctioning, as the court put it, "the mode of thought and behavior that underlies most prejudice and bigotry in modern America." Worse, affirmative action encourages minorities to think of their prospects as determined by their race, a view that has had a devastatingly subversive effect on the attitudes of many young blacks toward academic achievement.

Whether the ruling in *Gratz* will have any lasting impact may in the end be up to the Supreme Court. The Justices decided not to review *Hopwood* because the program in question at the University of Texas was discontinued. After the case from Michigan emerges from the appeals process, the Court will have its first opportunity in almost a quarter-century to rule directly on race-based admissions—and on the seemingly unshakable devotion of our universities to a pernicious doctrine that has been consistently rejected by the American people in opinion polls, that has rightly begun to come under the sanction of lower courts and voters alike, and that has injected more than a generation's worth of poison into the social air we breathe. One can only hope for the best.

* "Racial Preferences: What We Now Know," February 1999.
† "Race, Lies, and 'Hopwood,'" Commentary, June 1996.

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The Strange Adventures of Jacob d'Ancona

Hillel Halkin

THERE ARE found books and there are "found" books. To which category should we assign the curious case of a book called *The City of Light*, recently published in a long-delayed American edition as "The Hidden Journal of the Man Who Entered China Four Years Before Marco Polo?"*

This kind of question has been around, if not for as long as books themselves, then for the better part of their existence. The earliest known case occurred in 622 B.C.E. and can be read about in the Bible. Chapter 22 of Kings II tells us:

> And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of King Josiah that the king sent Shaphan . . . the scribe to the house of the Lord saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord. . . . And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan and he read it. . . . And Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest . . . saying, Go ye inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

Exactly what "book of the law" it was that the high priest "found" while counting the silver in the Temple is a matter of debate. Many scholars think it was Deuteronomy, for which there is evidence of a 7th-century provenance and in which there are grim warnings of the fate of those disobeying God's word that might explain Josiah's reaction. It is also debatable whether the book was found at all. The suspicious presence of a scribe in the story suggests him as its possible author, in which case we may be reading about the oldest literary hoax on record—a "hoax," if that is the right word for a document as monumental as Deuteronomy, with spectacular results, since it persuaded Josiah to launch a massive religious purge of Judeo-pagan practices. Perhaps Shaphan and Hilkiah were in cahoots; perhaps Josiah was in on it; perhaps the "found" book was cobbled together from preexisting sources. Most likely, there were Judeans of the age who wondered about it, too.

Religious works, particularly those purporting to be divinely inspired, feature prominently among famous "found" books, it being more credible to lay the mantle of revelation on ancient personages of

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* Citadel Press, 538 pp., $29.95.

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renown than on living men known, foibles and all, to their contemporaries. But one must distinguish between a book merely declared "found" and a book calculatedly presented as "found." Many of the biblical apocrypha written shortly before and after the commencement of the Common Era start with an assertion of hoary old age that is little more than a hurried formality; this is true, for example, of the 2nd-century B.C.E. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, whose chapters begin, "A copy of the testament of Reuben," "A copy of the words of Simeon," etc., with no further explanation of how the last wills of Jacob's twelve sons managed to survive unknown for two millennia. The equally apocryphal *Sybilline Oracles*, on the other hand, were issued in at least one ancient edition with a studious prologue tracing their composition to seers in the time of Euripides and Alexander the Great and detailing their preservation for hundreds of years in the Capitol in Rome. It is doubtful that the antiquity of *The Testaments* was ever taken seriously by anyone, but the *Oracles* fooled sophisticated readers well into the Renaissance.

No one ever accused the anonymous fabricators of the Apocrypha of pecuniary motives. The same cannot be said for the author of a more influential "found" book, the 13th-century Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon, who wrote the *Zohar*, a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch, and advertised it as a work by the 2nd-century Tannaitic sage Simon ben Yohai—his copy of which, de Leon claimed, the only one extant, had previously belonged to Maimonides. Already in his own day de Leon was accused of writing the book for profit; indeed, his contemporary Isaac the Blind was told by an acquaintance of de Leon that the latter, "a great spendthrift," financed his expensive habits by selling sections of the *Zohar* to wealthy patrons—a fact later confirmed, according to Isaac, by de Leon's wife. None of this prevented the book from becoming one of the most revered in the Jewish library, or from being commonly published to this day with the title page, *The Book of The Zohar on the Five Books of Moses by the Divine Tanna Rabbi Simon ben Yohai*.

A scandal of historic proportions? This was the opinion of the leading 19th-century Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz. But Graetz was answered by Gershom Scholem, the great 20th-century scholar of Kabbalah. "Pseudepigraphy," wrote Scholem, "is far removed from forgery, [for] the mark of immorality, which is inseparable from falsehood, does not stain it [and] the further a man progresses along his own road in the Quest for Truth, the more he might become convinced that his own road must have already been trodden in the ages before him."

If de Leon's desire to capitalize on his talents should not be held against them, this can also be argued for the *Book of Mormon*, "found" by Joseph Smith in 1827 near his home in Palmyra, New York. Said by Smith to be engraved on buried, eight-inch-square "golden plates" dug up on angelic instructions and never seen by anyone but himself, the book was supposedly written 1,500 years earlier by Moroni, a descendant of ancient Hebrews whose forefathers had reached America in 600 B.C.E. Smith, the evidence indicates, hoped to earn a hefty sum by publishing the *Book of Mormon* and only later founded a religion based on it. By then he may well have come to believe "his own road must have been trodden in the ages before him." The risks he ran as the leader of a persecuted offshoot of Christianity that ended with his lynching by an Illinois mob in 1844 hardly support viewing him as an ordinary grifter.

Not all "found" books have been religious. Perhaps the most celebrated example of the purely literary variety in Western culture is James Macpherson's now all-but-forgotten *The Works of Ossian*, published in 1765 as a combined edition of *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763). Ossian, a third-century Gaelic bard allegedly come across by Macpherson, a Scots minister, on his travels to the Hebrides, turned out never to have existed; before this became apparent, however, his romantic epics had caused a sensation and been enthusiastically read by (among others) Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, and Napoleon.

Subsequently elected to Parliament and upon his death buried with state honors in Westminster Abbey, Macpherson seems to have begun the Ossian series as a lark, only to find himself lionized for a discovery he could not disavow without embarrassment. One of the first to suspect the truth was the formidable Dr. Samuel Johnson, although it is hard today to see how anyone—let alone some of the finest writers in Europe—could have fallen for prose like, "A tale of the times of old! The deeds of days of other years! The murmur of thy streams, O Lora! brings back the memory of the past. The sound of the woods, Garmallar, is lovely in mine ear." Macpherson was still alive when, inspired by his success, the young Thomas Chatterton "found" the poems of a 15th-century English priest named Rowley, took poison at the age of nineteen when nothing came of them but rejection slips, and became a Romantic hero himself.

One of the most prolific book "finders" of modern times was a picaresque 19th-century figure

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named Abraham Firkowitsch, who also pilfered, wheedled, and borrowed without returning many genuine old manuscripts in the course of his wanderings through Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Firkowitsch's specialty was documents proving that the Karaites, a Jewish sect (to which he himself belonged) that denied the authority of postbiblical rabbinic tradition, were descended from the Ten Lost Tribes who were exiled centuries before the time of Jesus, and therefore could not be blamed for the crucifixion. The best-known of these documents, "found" in 1840 in a synagogue in Derbend on the Caspian Sea, was written by "Judah, son of Moses the punctuator from the east land, son of Judah the Brave of the tribe of Naphtali, of the family of Shillem, who wandered into exile with the exiles who were carried away with Hosea, king of Israel, together with the tribes of Simeon, Dan, and some families of the other tribes of Israel." Oddly, the same Graetz who excoriated de Leon's grand creation accepted this flimsy forgery as authentic in the second edition of his seven-volume *History of the Jews*.

But, of course, many found books have truly been found, Jewish ones included. The Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh*, composed, or translated from the Sumerian, circa 1750 B.C.E., was recovered from cuneiform tablets excavated in the 1840's at Nineveh by the English archeologist Austin Layard. The Egyptian *Book of The Dead*, the Akhnaton Hymns, the myths of Ugarit, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Gnostic gospels of Nag Hammadi are but a few of the other genuine literary and religious texts that have come to light in excavations. Most of the verse of the 11th-century Shmuel Hanagid, arguably the greatest of medieval Hebrew poets, turned up in 1926 amid some old manuscripts purchased by the Jewish bibliophile David Sassoon in Aleppo. The lost Finnish national epic the *Kalevala* was discovered in oral form in the remote countryside in the 19th century. Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Black Snow*, written shortly before its author's death in 1940, surfaced 30 years later in the files of the Soviet censor. David Fogel's 1928-29 Hebrew novel *Married Life*, buried in a garden on the eve of Fogel's deportation to a concentration camp, was finally published in Israel in 1986. And there are found Holocaust books themselves, like the diaries of Anne Frank and the notebooks of Emmanuel Ringelblum. Just because a book is said to have been found doesn't mean that it wasn't.

Which brings us back to *The City of Light*.

The City of Light, published as the work of one Jacob d'Ancona, as translated by David Selbourne, first appeared in England in 1997. Selbourne, the grandson of a rabbi, the author of many books—among them *Against Socialist Illusion* (1985) and *The Principle of Duty* (1997)*—and a tutor in political philosophy at Oxford until he settled in Italy in 1986, explained the circumstances of its publication in his introduction to that edition.

In 1990, wrote Selbourne, he was visited in his home in Urbino by an unnamed Italian Christian "aware of my interest in Judaica" who wished to show him a medieval manuscript. Several months later, he was given this manuscript to read in the man's house. Bound "in creased and discolored vellum," it was "25.5 cm tall and 19.5 cm wide," contained "280 leaves," and was written "on both sides of each page . . . on clear, fine paper in a small but careful and usually clear running italic hand." Although it had no title or title page, its opening paragraph stated:

> It was in the year 1270, which is to say 5030 years from the creation of the world, blessed be He, upon the sixteenth day of April and the twenty-third day of Nisan when Giovanni Confaloniere was *podesta* and Matteo Angeli and Giacomo Bladioni were captains of the people, that I, Jacob, son of Salomone of Ancona and grandson of the great Rabbi Israel of Florence, may his memory be recorded, merchant of Ancona, embarked on board ship for my departure to Greater India and the farthest shores of the earth.

As he read on, Selbourne wrote, he realized that he was looking at "an extraordinary find"—the late-13th-century memoir of "a Jewish scholar-merchant [who] had preceded Marco Polo by a handful of years to the furthest Orient, leaving a brilliant account of his travels and experience . . . in particular, the astonishing description which he gives of the tribulations of the southern Chinese city of Zaitun, as [the] Mongol conquest drew near." ("City of light" was, Jacob tells us, the inhabitants' name for Zaitun, known as Quanzhou in modern China and Canton in the West.)

Written in Italian though possibly translated from a Hebrew original, the manuscript, according to Selbourne, had been kept concealed over the centuries due to its anti-Christian passages, which would have endangered its original Jewish possessors and embarrassed the Christians into whose hands it eventually passed. Indeed, even its present owner had great qualms about making it public. He "changed his mind several times about the wisdom of permitting the book's existence to become known, while I, having been made aware that he would probably not

* This book has recently been reissued in paperback by the University of Notre Dame Press, 344 pp., $18.00.

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permit the book's exact whereabouts to be identified during his lifetime, and that his heirs might do likewise, wrestled with my own doubts about translating a manuscript to which others would not have easy access, and even no access at all."

Nevertheless, Selbourne continued, he overcame these doubts and translated the manuscript after accepting the owner's condition that it not be photocopied or removed from his house and that his anonymity be preserved. Selbourne was of course aware that, by publishing an alleged medieval document of a sensational nature without an original to vouch for it, he would be exposing himself, even if he annotated the text copiously, to charges of fabrication. Yet, he wrote, "Although I have naturally come under pressure to reveal more, I do not intend to do so. It is both a matter of honor and of gratitude for an act of faith." (In the end, he was accused by his Italian acquaintance of breaking faith anyway after he approached a literary agent about the manuscript in 1996. Since then, he has said, its indignant owner has refused to talk to him or even answer his letters.)

Thus born out of literary wedlock, *The City of Light* aroused a storm of controversy from the start. Understandably suspicious of Selbourne's story, the first scholars to review the book's English edition looked hard for incriminating evidence and found it. Academics like Tim Barret of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, the American professor of Chinese history Jonathan Spence, the Italianist David Abulafia, Frances Wood of the British Museum's Chinese department, and the Jewish historians Bernard and David Wasserstein cited numerous details in Jacob of Ancona's account as incorrect, implausible, inconsistent, anachronistic, and clearly indicative of a contemporary authorship. Jacob, they argued, could never have reached China from Ancona in the first place; uses words and names that are uncorroborated or came into existence decades or even centuries after his supposed trip; and describes features of life in China and Zaitun that do not square with historical fact. His memoir, all agreed, could only have been the work of Selbourne himself or of someone Selbourne was duped by, a conclusion that so alarmed Little, Brown—Selbourne's prospective American publisher—that it canceled its contract with him.

JUST WHEN the case of *The City of Light* seemed about to be closed, however, the plot thickened. A vigorous counterattack was launched in Selbourne's defense. Surprisingly, its main spokesmen were Chinese. They argued that, far from Jacob of Ancona being mistaken in his Chinese terminology and descriptions, those in error were his Western critics whose knowledge of medieval China was deficient. The most impressive of Selbourne's supporters was the director of Quanzhou's Maritime Museum, a local historian named Wang Lianmao.

In a lengthy essay, Wang examined the ostensible refutations of Jacob's veracity and found fault with each. Jacob's descriptions of late-13th-century Zaitun, he maintained, were in fact astonishingly accurate—so much so that they could be taken for prima-facie evidence of his having been there. Several of his Chinese terms, scoffed at by reviewers, were actually medieval Quanzhou dialect, which led Wang to ask: "Could there possibly be someone so competent in medieval Italian, Hebrew, and Latin, and also so familiar with the history, customs, and dialect of Song-era Quanzhou who would be able to forge such a book?"

The tide had turned—if not in the direction of Selbourne's acquittal, at least toward a hung jury. A publisher was found for an American edition of *The City of Light* and Wang Lianmao's essay, along with a retrospective afterword by Selbourne, have been included in it.

For the reader who has some knowledge of the issues involved but is neither a medievalist nor a Sinologist, all this makes *The City of Light* both a more and a less judgeable book. On the one hand, unable to assess the fine points fought over by the experts, such a reader has little means of deciding among them. But on the other hand, if the experts cannot agree, perhaps expertise is not the sole key to the matter. A book can be right or wrong in its details; it can also, however, *feel* right or wrong in its totality, its overall tone. As it happens, a parallel debate is now going on over the supposed travels to China of Marco Polo himself. As part of that debate, it is possible to ask whether tea was a popular Chinese drink in Marco's time and, if so, why does he not mention it; but it is also possible to ask whether Marco sounds like a man who has gone where and done what he says he has.

One can look, in other words, at the forest or at the trees—and while it is clearly preferable to do both if one can, there is also justification for leaving the trees to the botanists and experiencing the forest for oneself.

ACTUALLY, *The City of Light* is two forests, the first richly variegated, the second wearily repetitive.

Until Jacob's trading expedition reaches Zaitun—that is, for roughly the first quarter of his account—the scenery keeps changing. We follow him on his

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departure from Ancona for the Adriatic seaport of Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik); sail from there to Crete; continue to Cyprus; land in Acre in Crusader Palestine; travel by camel caravan to Damascus; cross the Syrian Desert to Basra, where Jacob marries off his son Isaac to the daughter of his brother Isaia, a merchant based in the Persian Gulf; set sail from there for India; round its southern tip with a stop in Ceylon; survive a storm in the Bay of Bengal in which one of the ships in Jacob's fleet goes down; make port in Sumatra; and finally, on August 13, 1271, a year and four months after setting out from Italy, cast anchor in Zaitun's great harbor on the South China coast, filled on the day of Jacob's arrival with an estimated "fifteen thousand ships."

Along the way, Jacob buys and sells goods, visits Jewish communities, takes in the sights, and records his impressions in language that (as befits a man of the world, a pious Jew, and an avid disciple of the philosophy of Maimonides) combines observation with reflection. A typical passage reads:

> For some days and nights we journeyed in the desert of Syria . . . and suffered greatly from the heat of the sun, so hot that it was a marvel. When the noon comes, since there is no shady place, it is difficult to stay alive in the rocky hills, and even the camels cry out in their dolor, the tears running from their eyes, may God have pity upon them. . . . Yet I gave praise to God for keeping me in safety and called upon my Christian servants to do likewise. Some murmured against me, but in all men, provided that they be better than beasts, there exists an impulse toward God. For who but God, I asked, is the promoter of the natural life of the world? But they, because of the evil works of idolatry, have no true conception of God, may the Unnameable One be exalted. . . . For *that man* stands for them in the light of God, blessed be He, whom they therefore cannot know.

One can have one's doubts about such prose. It is unlike that of any other Jewish writer of the Middle Ages, a period that did not encourage stylistic originality, and seems verbose and discursive in comparison with medieval Jewish travel documents like Benjamin of Tudela's or Petahiah of Regensburg's (both from the late 12th century). Furthermore, if originally written in Hebrew, there are puzzling things about it. Whereas "*that man*" for Jesus is genuinely Hebraic, phrases like "the Unnameable One" or "an impulse toward God" are not.

One may also wonder about Jacob's itinerary and behavior. It is rather odd, certainly, that, so near Jerusalem when in Acre, he does not bother to visit it or other holy places in the Land of Israel; odder still that, though his route to Damascus would have taken him right past or even through Tiberias, the site of the tomb of his revered Maimonides, he does not stop there to pay his respects. (Although it is not absolutely certain that Maimonides, who died in Egypt in 1204, was actually buried in Tiberias, a tradition to that effect already existed in Jacob's time.) The graves of great rabbis were shrines of importance for medieval Jews and it is hard to understand why Jacob would have missed this one.

But such things, of which there are many in the manuscript's opening pages, are hardly conclusive. It is possible to give Jacob, if one is so inclined, the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he composed his memoir in an Italian influenced by Christian models despite there being no known case of a medieval Jew writing in a European vernacular. Perhaps he was in a hurry to reach Basra for his son's wedding and lacked time for a side trip to Jerusalem. Perhaps he did visit Maimonides' tomb and forgot to mention it. It is only when he reaches Zaitun that the reader begins to smell—as did Dr. Johnson in Macpherson's *Ossian*—a serious rat.

JACOB IS at first overwhelmed by Zaitun. It is a metropolis far bigger than any he has known, so that he asks himself in his first days there, "How shall a man speak rightly of the great city of Zaitun, when his soul is thrown into such confusion in it that he would go with his ears stopped and eyes covered in order to preserve his reason?" In addition to its hundreds of thousands of Chinese residents, it is filled with Indians, Arabs, Armenians, Turks, Franks, Venetians, Genoese, Pisans, Anconetans, and even 2,000 Jews—who, "of all the peoples in the city who have come from other countries . . . have inhabited it the longest." All have been attracted by its commercial opportunities, for its markets "are of an abundance such as has never yet been known" and its shops "are more numerous than in any other city of the world." Through its streets, day and night, pours a "vast throng [of] peasants and citizens without number, the rich and the poor, men and women, masters and servants, noblemen and miscreants, Sinimiani [Chinese] and strangers, and those who go in silk and those who go in rags."

As Jacob's stay in the city of light lengthens, however, he comes to realize that its woes are as great as its riches. Its poor are legion and uncared-for. Its streets are dirty, crime-ridden, and unsafe. Its wealthy live a life of conspicuous consumption, caring nothing for the common weal. Its politicians,

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corrupt and self-seeking, are out to feather their own nests. Sexual permissiveness and profligacy are everywhere. Homosexuality is rampant. Religion and its codes have ceased to be taken seriously. The educational system has broken down. The young no longer respect their elders. Women, in rebellion against their traditional roles, do not wish to be mothers or housewives. Family structure is in disarray. The entire city, in fact, is in an advanced state of social and moral disintegration.

To make matters worse, the barbarians are at the gate. The Tartars or Mongols, ruled by the legendary Kublai Khan, have already conquered Cathay or northern China and are about to launch an attack on the south. Torn by internal conflict and rotten with decay, Zaitun is in no condition to resist. "While the Tartars drew near," Jacob writes, "each man looked only to himself." Feeling that he can see "the sun glitter upon the swords of the Mongols," he hesitates to venture beyond the city's limits and fears it may fall before he can finish his business and reembark for home.

Yet Jacob is fascinated by Zaitun. Although he could presumably sell all his merchandise and stock up on Chinese goods for the homeward voyage in a matter of weeks, he lingers in the city, accompanied by his Italian-Chinese interpreter Lifenli, for six months, "greatly troubled in soul and body as I passed through the streets, inquiring of myself how such a city . . . might be justly governed." These cogitations find a focus when he meets an elderly sage called Pitaco who hosts an intellectual salon that Jacob begins to attend. Soon the two become allies, for the Maimonidean Jew and the old-style Confucian share a point of view. Both are horrified by Zaitun's decadence and believe the only cure for it is a return to tradition, social discipline, civic responsibility, and strict standards of personal conduct, and both are convinced that the city of light will be easy prey for the enemy unless such a change of head and heart occurs.

The pages that follow, comprising over half of Jacob's manuscript, are largely devoted to his and Pitaco's wordy disputes with their opponents. With one exception, these are representatives of what today would be called "left-wing" or "liberal" positions who speak in defense of the trends at work in Zaitun. A partial list of them would include the social egalitarians who insist that "only if all are considered equally, without regard to merit, can peace reign among men"; the anti-capitalists who argue that it is "unjust [for the rich] to be permitted to lie on a soft couch while others have to carry the heavy pole on their shoulders"; the radical feminists who contend that a woman "should not give her body to the lusts of men, for men seek only to employ the bodies of women for their relief"; the criminal-reform advocates who maintain that "better indeed that men should break the law than that punishment should make us less than men"; the progressive educators who believe that a child should be taught "to recognize that which is true for himself and not only that which is true for others"; and the foreign-policy appeasers who oppose fighting the Tartars because their victory will lead to a more just society and ask, "Why should we die in a battle which must at the last be lost?"

Finally, on the Right, as it were, are the free-market utopians who think all would be ideal in Zaitun if only everyone pursued his own private interests exclusively, it being "in the nature of man to seek his own ends," so that "in the round of buying and selling, in which all take part, the city becomes both rich and free." As neoconservatives with a social conscience, Jacob and Pitaco challenge all these various schools of thought in the name of the old virtues, among them a concern for the public good and for the welfare of the less fortunate.

Needless to say, terms like "social egalitarian," "radical feminist," and "neoconservative" are not used in Zaitun; yet the fact that they so naturally occur to the reader of Jacob's manuscript must arouse suspicion. It is one thing to read of a great medieval city that has many of the ills of contemporary New York or London; cities are cities, after all, and, cultural and technological differences notwithstanding, may come to resemble each other. It is quite another thing to find that the intellectual discourse of such a city (allowing for stylistic differences between Jacob's debating partners and, say, the *New York Review of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement*) is that of contemporary New York and London, too. The possibility that one is reading, not the account of a medieval traveler, but a late-20th-century dystopian novel à la *Gulliver's Travels*, can hardly fail to occur.

Nor is this the only thing about the Pitaco chapters of *The City of Light* to strain credulity. Jacob, let us remember, apart from fearing the Tartars, has a family and business responsibilities in Ancona, where his investment partners, like him, are losing money each day he remains in Zaitun with his ships and sailors. (Although he stays on until late February, the prevailing winds would have been favorable for a return trip as early as November.) Furthermore, he does not know Chinese and depends on Lifenli to translate the often tumultuous discussions at Pitaco's. Even supposing that this Chinese youth

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might have picked up the political and philosophical vocabulary in Italian needed for such a task, is it conceivable that, with his aid, Jacob could follow and actively participate for hours at a time—indeed, for months on end—in rapid-fire Chinese debates full of shouts and interruptions? Is it conceivable that he would attempt to do this at the expense of his commercial interests?

The Pitaco chapters, spelled here and there by Jacob's titillating excursions into Zaitun's nightlife and lowlife, are tedious not only because they are windy and redundant, but because we already know all their arguments from the intellectual wars of our own times. In fact—*mirabile dictu!*—we know Jacob and Pitaco's arguments from Selbourne's own books, and especially from his *The Principle of Duty*:

> Here, for example, is Pitaco:
>
> Now there are even sages among us who teach not only that wrong may be right, but that good may be bad, so that all have lost the way. . . . Worst of all are those among us who say that a man should not be judged for his deeds. . . . They also argue that the same man should not be taught that his deeds are wrongful, since none may rightly judge such matters. . . . Hence they have made a wilderness of the city, in which the wild beast within man is unchained.
>
> And here is *The Principle of Duty*:
>
> [We see] the increasingly common refusal in the corrupted liberal order to permit practical discrimination at all between the moral and amoral. . . . The suppression of the concept of justice-as-desert . . . has also done much to displace and discredit the very idea—an ethical and civic idea—of worth and unworth in citizen conduct. . . . In such an ethical limbo . . . ethical categories are at cynical worst considered to have no meaning at all. . . . Under the rule of dutiless right, law, blind to its ethical tasks, may lose its way even with the basest of crimes; even when man turns beast. . . .

Reading these books in tandem, indeed, suggests two possible conclusions: either Selbourne wrote *The City of Light* or else he plagiarized it. That the first of these is more probable emerges from his own account, which simply does not hang together. Why, for instance, should the Italian owner of Jacob's alleged manuscript, having agreed to let Selbourne peruse and translate it, refuse to allow it to be photocopied? Even had he been determined to preserve his anonymity, how could a mere photocopy have compromised him? Precisely such a copy, even of a single page, examined by handwriting experts, could have proved that his manuscript was genuinely old. (So could have a small piece of its vellum subjected to radio-carbon tests.) Why object to this?

Or take the fact that we do not have even the text, let alone the manuscript, of Jacob's book in its original Italian, which might also have enabled experts to establish its authenticity. According to Selbourne, this is because he translated the manuscript in its owner's house, from which he came away with only an English version. Yet this makes no sense. Translating takes far more time than copying. Why did not Selbourne copy the Italian text and translate it elsewhere at his leisure? That way, he could also have referred back to it when necessary rather than having to rely on memory.

Selbourne's story of the owner's refusing to step forward because of the anti-Christian passages in the manuscript is likewise impossible to credit. For one thing, these passages could have been omitted from a published version; most of them occur in a single chapter of *The City of Light* in which Jacob debates a Catholic priest at Pitaco's salon, and their absence would not have been felt. Moreover, although Jacob is certainly hostile to Christianity, he says nothing about it that has not been said in print innumerable times by Jews and Gentiles alike. That an Italian Catholic of our day and age, however devout, would fear the consequences of its becoming known that such a medieval manuscript was in his possession is, to say the least, farfetched. And if nevertheless he did feel this way, why show the manuscript to Selbourne in the first place? Why not continue to keep it the secret it had been?

These questions have no logical answer. Or rather, they have only one: that there was no medieval manuscript and no Italian owner of it to begin with.

BUT WHY "find" Jacob of Ancona's manuscript if it did not exist? And especially, why "find" it if you are, as acquaintances of Selbourne have testified, a man of great personal integrity? It was indeed Selbourne's stubborn sticking to principle in academic matters, it is said, that helped make enemies for him at Oxford and deprived him of backing when left-wing faculty successfully sought to oust him from his job.

This leads one to propose a theory. At worst, it could be wrong.

Let us think of David Selbourne losing or leaving his position at Oxford in the mid-1980's because his anti-Left opinions are unpopular in academically chic circles. Now living in Italy, he sets out to write a historical novel about a medieval Italian traveler to China and researches his subject so thoroughly that

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native Chinese scholars will be impressed by his knowledge when the book appears. It is a highly political novel in which he strikes back against his opponents, whom he portrays as fatuous 13th-century Chinese intellectuals, while advancing his own views on what he will later call, in *The Principle of Duty*, "civic disaggregation"—the contemporary disintegration of the bonds of mutual responsibility linking citizens in the body politic.

This disintegration, he believes, derives from a political philosophy, ultimately traceable to English Enlightenment thinkers like Locke via 19th-century liberals like Mill and Bentham, by which "a path or passage has been traced in the name of the (corrupted) liberal ideal from the noble principle of the freedom and dignity of the individual to the base politics of dutiless rights." Such a politics, as he sees it, has undermined European and American society and imperils the very basis of Western civilization.

But Western civilization is imperiled from another direction as well, that of Soviet totalitarian expansion—which, though its threat may be pooh-poohed at Oxford, seems real to Selbourne precisely because the "corrupted liberal order" lacks the political and military will to resist it. He therefore chooses to set his story, called *The City of Light*, in a parallel situation, in the wealthy metropolis of Zaitun on the eve of its fall to the Tartars, which took place in March 1273. Novelistically, this works well, since the ominously growing Tartar menace adds a touch of suspense to an otherwise static work of fiction. He also decides to make his hero a philosophically inclined Jew who, as an outsider looking in on both Christian Europe and China, can cogently speak for Judaism as the supreme religion of duty. Jacob of Ancona, in other words, will be an alter ego of the author of *The Principle of Duty*, who in that work will say of himself:

> I have written this essay on duty as a citizen among citizens, or as a Jewish citizen-stranger, and not as a voice of authority. . . . In asserting a "principle of duty" by which both citizen and civic order are bound . . . I fulfill my personal moral duty as an intellectual and explain the need for a like duty to be assumed by others. At the same time, I seek to fulfill the more particular task—or "historic mission," as the poet Heine put it—of the *ewiger Jude* [eternal Jew] to "spread the seed of social transformation."

And so the novel, *The City of Light*, is written in the mid-1980's. Selbourne, however, has failed to take into account one thing—namely, that by the time his book has been gotten ready for publication, the Soviet empire will have unexpectedly collapsed. A historical development he is thankful for, this nevertheless plunges him into authorial despair. What is he to do now? Publish the novel as is? But the dramatic parallel it is built on has vanished, turning its one fictional strength into a thematically irrelevant distraction. Rewrite it by excising the Tartar material? This would be structurally difficult and leave the book lamely plotless. Trash it? He has invested too much for that.

For several years, his manuscript lies in a drawer. And then he has an inspiration. He will change Jacob of Ancona from the manuscript's fictional author to its real one, and "find" it. This will make it an attention-getter despite its weaknesses and guarantee it the hearing it deserves. . . .

My scenario breaks off at this point because I have no idea what might go through a mind like David Selbourne's at the moment of such a decision. Does he initially, like James Macpherson, consider it a lark from which it later becomes impossible to retreat? Does he, like Moses de Leon, feel he has written something so important that he is justified in promoting it by subterfuge? Here, as the biblical Joseph tells Pharaoh's wise men, interpretations belong to God.

It is possible, however, to add a postscript to this entirely conjectural script. Between writing Jacob of Ancona's story and publishing it as a "found" book, Selbourne did write *The Principle of Duty*, a more important work than *The City of Light*. Composed in a spare, lucid, functional prose that is the very opposite of Jacob's prolixity, and that is admirably free of academic jargon, it provides a first-rate analysis of where contemporary liberalism went wrong intellectually. It should be required reading in any college course on modern political philosophy.

As a "found" book, *The City of Light* is not one of the more memorable examples of its genre. But although Jacob of Ancona the traveler to China is almost certainly a figment of David Selbourne's imagination, he has justified his existence if he helped Selbourne to formulate the ideas of *The Principle of Duty* more clearly. Perhaps this is enough to remove from him the "stain of immorality" of which Gershom Scholem absolved Moses de Leon. Meanwhile, the first American edition of *The City of Light* costs only $29.95 and may some day be worth its weight in Depression glass. Imagine if de Leon's duped patrons had saved their chapters of the *Zohar*.

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Paradoxes of Painting

David Gelernter

It is a terrible time for painting in America, but a marvelous time for painters. Compare today with (say) the 1950's. The 50's were a cultural high-point in American history. Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, and Alexander Calder were names that wielded Hollywood glamor with the public. Abstract expressionism was simultaneously a leading-edge movement and a major influence on wallpaper design: high culture and home decorating intersected. Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, and sometimes Hans Hofmann and to a lesser extent their fellow abstract expressionists, made pictures that ranked with some of the most beautiful in the history of art. Although abstract art was in, there was plenty of room for such heterodox artists as Joseph Cornell and Edward Hopper, and veneration to spare for such great Europeans as Henri Matisse or Alberto Giacometti, not to mention a younger generation of rising Americans (especially Jasper Johns) who seemed to be inventing a new kind of figurative painting. In those days, the American public cared enough about painting to make fun of it.

Since then, contemporary painting has disappeared from the public mind, and the contemporary art scene strikes many basically sympathetic observers as not quite right in the head. Granted, there are first-rate artists, dealers, and critics mixed up in the mess like fine china in a mudslide. We have our own old masters: Cy Twombly and Gerhard Richter, Frank Stella, Georg Baselitz, Andrew Forge. And Jasper Johns, dean of living painters. Nevertheless, the educated public steers clear of the art scene as it does of madmen in the streets.

And still it is a marvelous time to be a painter in America. I will give my reasons below, after making four claims about painting today: one about its standing with the public, one about the painting as an object, one about painters themselves, and the last about painting's meaning and consequences. Each claim is paradoxical in a way.

Claim one: nearly everyone has been moved by music or a story at one time or other, but relatively few people have ever been moved by a painting. We believe ours to be some sort of "visual age," but painting is today the least popular of arts. Only a small part of the explanation lies in the art world's peculiar condition.

We are often told otherwise, of course. We are told that booming museum attendance means that the public is famished for art. If you believe that, you will believe anything. Ask any child: for the most part, crowds at the big shows barely look at the paintings; there are more people gathered

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around the signs and labels than the pictures. For many of these people, words are easier to read than painted images.

Perhaps the human visual sense tends to be poorly developed because we tend not to bother developing it. But that cannot be the whole story. Giacometti once said: I recognize faces but I don't know how I recognize them; even if I've looked at them carefully for countless hours, I still can't draw them from memory. He was one of the century's great portraitists.

Most people can hum a tune or tell a story from memory, but very few have ever been able to draw a particular face from memory. The visual arts have a lot to contend with: looking comes naturally to us but seeing does not. Our uncertainty about painting and sculpture is reflected in the language; we lack even a decent word for painting and sculpture together with drawing, collage-making, and so forth, a word corresponding to "music" or "literature." All we have is "visual art," which is a cheesy phrase suggesting desperation. "Sculpture" itself is an unsatisfactory word. It suggests only carving, not modeling or assemblage.

The big event in the modern history of visual art was the invention of photography. A paradox: photography (which competes with painting) was the loveliest gift painting ever got. The invention of photography meant that painting hit the jackpot—won a billion dollars in the lottery, quit its job, and was free to do whatever it felt like for the rest of history.

Before photography, it was taken for granted that an artist must be a first-rate draftsman. But Cézanne, a "postphotography" artist, was not a natural draftsman, and neither was van Gogh or Matisse; yet they produced some of history's greatest masterpieces. All three saw their technical limitations as challenges and obstacles, and transcended them by monumental labor and powerful artistic intelligence. Their limitations brought out the best in them. Since the invention of photography, the best nonvirtuosi have seen the need to transcend their technical limitations; the virtuoso (Degas, Picasso, de Kooning, Johns) has had to transcend his virtuosity. After photography, virtuosity alone no longer made you an artist.

So painting owes much to photography. And yet, because of photography—not so much the bare process as the rise (still underway) of high-quality color printing, which makes photography ubiquitous—painting might never again be a popular art. Wherever they compete head-on, photography will always drive out painting, not because it is truer but because it is cheaper. And the camera babies us, spoon-feeds us predigested images. In the long run, we will have to work diligently if we mean to maintain our ability to come to grips with a painting—to look long and hard.

Claim two: one of the most important qualities of a painting has nothing to do with line or color or any aspect of imagery. A painting or sculpture is an energy source, like a charged battery or compressed spring. It absorbs energy from the artist and radiates it back to the looker.

Photographers have produced brilliant and memorable pictures. (Ultimately, Joel Meyerowitz's photographs of Cape Cod will be on everybody's list of the greatest images of the late 20th century.) But no great photograph has ever had anything like the power of a great painting. Why? Because you cannot knock a man down with a potato chip no matter how hard you throw it, or power an aircraft carrier with a rubber band no matter how tight you wind it—or load up a photograph with enough energy to make it great art.

How does the artist get energy into a painting? No one knows.

A picture's energy content has nothing to do with how elaborate or highly worked it is. A smudged chalk line by Michelangelo can be more highly charged than a half-acre of Correggio. But the energy of an artwork ordinarily reflects in some way the intensity of the artist's effort. And sheer intensity of effort can, if it is done right and focused properly, raise a picture's energy level even if it produces no direct visual effect at all.

Consider the two most celebrated portraits of modern history, Cézanne's of the art dealer Ambroise Vollard and Picasso's of Gertrude Stein.

Vollard sat for Cézanne 115 times, and then Cézanne abandoned the not-quite-finished painting and said to Vollard what has become the most celebrated pronouncement in modern art: "I am not discontent with the front of the shirt."

The painting is famous not merely among art historians who know this story. It has a radiant intensity—along with so much of Cézanne's work, of course—that some people clearly feel even if they know nothing about the painting's history.

Gertrude Stein sat for Picasso 90-odd times. Picasso was unsatisfied, left the painting for a while, then painted out the face and installed another: a mask-like face that became famous. If he had known from the start how to paint that face and had sat down and done it in fifteen minutes, the picture (my guess is) would never have developed such enormous power. After all, Picasso painted all sorts of mask-

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faces in and around 1906. The Stein portrait became famous in part because Gertrude Stein did, but another part of its enormous reputation clearly rests on many people's sense of its huge energy.

Giacometti would rebuild a sculpture or painting from scratch again and again. In most cases no trace remained of all the rebuildings and reworkings; but as James Soby wrote in 1955, Giacometti's pieces "magnetize the surrounding air and light."

No paintings are less labored than Matisse's. But toward the end of his career, Matisse started exhibiting photographs of paintings-in-progress along with the finished pieces, as if he wanted to make clear that his pictures were the farthest thing from tossed-off improvisations. True, the appeal of his pictures lies partly in their seeming effortlessness; yet if you look at them in the belief that they actually *were* effortless, you miss something important. At least Matisse seemed to think so.

The purest expression of this theme might be a cryptic comment attributed to Jasper Johns: that he would like to exhibit an artwork consisting of a rubber mask deformed into a concave shape, then reflected in a convex mirror that made it look exactly as it had looked to begin with. The image in the mirror would be the artwork.

The obvious question is, where is the art? Where is it hiding? If the image in the mirror is identical to the mask we started with, what has the artist done? The answer is: he has added energy. He hasn't changed anything visually, but he has taken an arbitrary object and pumped up its energy level—in roughly the sense that you can load energy into a rock (without changing the rock) by lifting it against the force of gravity. Johns thought (if he said what he is said to have said) that he could turn a rubber mask into art by loading *it* with energy. And he was probably right.

CLAIM THREE: ordinarily, as I have said, the high energy level of a painting reflects the intense labor an artist has put into it. But when we say that an artist is, often, someone who works relentlessly, we are also describing a personality type: a perfectionist, an obsessive. Given two people, one who turns things out quickly and moves on amiably to the next, the other who labors over each one and moves on reluctantly, the first is likely to be happier with his results. He might well be a happier person in general. But the second is more likely to produce energy-charged artworks.

Being a perfectionist doesn't mean that you achieve perfection. It makes you more likely to feel that you never achieve it. A perfectionist is a dissatisfactionist. The same force that drives artists to work relentlessly on their artworks, to load them up with energy, makes them unlikely ever to be wholly content with what they have done.

Giacometti again, who was in many different ways the conscience of 20th-century art: "From 1935 onward, I never made anything the way I wanted it. Not even once." All Giacometti's great works date from 1935 onward, but no one ever doubted the sincerity of his statement. And it seemed to capture something fundamental about art. Cézanne and Vollard, Picasso and Gertrude Stein: superhuman accomplishments require superhuman talent, or a superhuman capacity for unhappiness with your work, or both.

An artist sees pictures in his mind and tries to transfer them out of his mind—tries to *get* them out of his mind we could say, thereby italicizing the relationship between art and obsessive or compulsive personalities. "When I paint," Matisse said, "I am giving plastic expression to objects in my mind. When I close my eyes, I can see things better than with my eyes open. . . . This is what I paint."

Here is another paradox: at the bottom of the art of painting there is a mismatch between mind and hand. However long and hard an artist might work on a picture, the original mental image came to him in a flash; that is how mental pictures work. They appear instantaneously. Having imagined a picture, you might play with it in your mind for a long time—but the basic idea took virtually no time to imagine. And so no artist ever catches up with the pictures in his mind; no artist can ever hope to realize more than the tiniest fraction of what he imagines. An artist is, therefore, someone who spends more time suppressing his visual imagination than egging it on.

I have been painting since I was a child. One morning in 1977, two pictures occurred to me: a gentle lyrical one having to do with a nude drawn a certain away, with certain colors; and a dark one, having to do with a crucifixion seen from behind (the crucifixion being at least as much the property of Judaism as of Christianity, although few Jewish artists—Chagall is the most important exception—have taken it on). These images took a few seconds to imagine and have kept me busy, on and off, for almost a quarter-century. I have made many versions of each, and have yet to realize either in a wholly satisfying way. The only thing is to keep trying.

CLAIM FOUR: art doesn't progress, any more than human nature does. A scientist builds on the work of his predecessors, and science as a

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whole makes progress. But an artist merely does his best to convert mental images into physical ones.

Many great artists had no direct pictorial influence on anyone. No one but Cornell, Rothko, Giacometti—this list could go on and on—could make anything resembling a Cornell or a Rothko or a Giacometti, for obvious reasons: their styles were wholly personal and idiosyncratic. Essentially the same holds for Titian, Velazquez, and Vermeer. They had spiritual influence, of course, but that is not the sort of thing art historians usually have in mind when they speak of influence.

What they have in mind is (for example) Michelangelo's influence, which was huge, a gale sweeping the 16th century. Artists—mannerists and countermannerists—who might have made good had they trusted their own resources tried to imitate him and were swept overboard. No one could stand where he stood. (Beethoven once told a friend that he did not go to hear Mozart's operas because he did not want his own style to be compromised. Influence can be dangerous.)

Picasso had enormous influence: the canonical case. But when we round up the other great painters of the 20th century, we find that very few ever made a major painting that looked anything like a Picasso. Picasso invented cubism; and what good did cubism ever do? The virtues of Picasso's cubist masterpieces are the virtues of Picasso, not of cubism: the sense of balance, the virtuosity, the uncanny eye for capturing and abstracting likenesses, the energy.

Certain cubist paintings by Picasso are said to be indistinguishable from paintings by Georges Braque. My guess is that in the long run, no one but historians will ever look at any of them—or, despite today's Braque boom, at the Braque versions, or at any other paintings by Braque. (*Are* Braque and Picasso sometimes indistinguishable, or is this a story art critics tell gullible laymen? I have sometimes mistaken a weak Picasso for a Braque, but cannot ever remember mistaking a Braque for a Picasso; and I would bet that lots of people could say the same. Picasso's cubist paintings are tightly carpentered. The pieces fit beautifully, without gaps. Braque's sprawl like worn-out snow fences.)

On intellectual (as opposed to artistic) grounds, cubism is a racket: a catch-all for all sorts of styles in which the picture space is not quite flat, the image is not quite abstract, and the nervous juddering ostinato lines have a wound-up, caffeine energy that is exhilarating for short periods and impossible to sustain. The art historian Meyer Schapiro memorably called the browns, ochres, and grays of Picasso's cubist palette the "colors of thought"—but they are also the colors of coffee. Of all the many (related) styles Picasso developed over his lifetime, full-blown analytic cubism is the only one he ever dropped from his harem.

Another paradox: the aspects of an artist's style that other artists can imitate, that are the most "influential," are exactly the ones that are most generic and least valuable. Nothing could be more characteristically Beethovenish than the phrase of irregular length, or the theme that encompasses several keys. Every composer admired Beethoven and most composers wanted to be like him. But admiration did not make them capable of inventing irregular phrases, or themes that encompassed many keys.

Science is a crescendo. Art is an expanding circle.

I BEGAN by saying that painting has not been in terribly much favor lately. The art establishment has been in trouble and acting strangely since the 70's. Acclaim for artists has been in short supply. So why have recent decades been ideal for American painters?

For one thing, no artist who tries to please a crowd of more than one is likely to do anything of value. (It is hard enough to do anything of value in any case.) As E.B. White remarked in another context, let a writer "start sniffing the air, or glancing at the Trend Machine, and he is as good as dead, although he may make a nice living." No crowd means no temptation; it means that the act of painting is boiled down to its essence, sheer obstinate compulsion.

It also means no encouragement, and the danger of turning your back on your own era. Painting changes, and a painter has to be part of his times. A few artists have rejected the here-and-now and gotten away with it, Joseph Cornell being probably the most brilliant; but it rarely works. Picasso said, "Art that is not in the present will never be." A painter must know and feel what is going on around him. And a painter, like any human being—probably more than most—wants and needs approval and acclaim.

Still, if you *are* going to be rejected by the establishment, today's is (at least) the perfect establishment to be rejected by. In *Art & Auction*, a magazine that speaks serenely from the center of the culture scene, Steven Vincent wrote recently of the art world's "nostalgia for the days when art was not riddled with postmodernism's adolescent smirk." "Smirk" is exactly right: the paradigmatic teenage response to a thing you do not understand but feel obliged to make fun of anyway. When the middle

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class used to ridicule "modern art," it usually took an affable, "it's beyond *us*" tone. Today the art world ridicules art pure and simple with naked contempt and a mirthless nihilism that is chilling.

It used to be that an artist could be part of the establishment, in which case he was well-known and made money but, chances are, his work suffered; or he could be an outsider, free to work and mope undistracted, virtue intact, ego in tatters. Today's dissident artist enjoys the best of both worlds, proud not to belong to the smirk-art establishment.

There *is* a new, dissident art today—"postironic art." It is rarely charming, and is sometimes violent or ugly. Mostly it centers on human beings—portraits, nudes—and often it rides between the subway cars of established genres: the painted high relief, the painting that is part stained glass, the painting that, boiled down and intensified by digital photography and reduced-scale reproduction, becomes the ground for another painting. Often it is religious art. Of course it speaks for itself; words cannot speak for pictures.

The galleries where today's dissident art is shown, and the artworks themselves, are far from the art world's center. But it doesn't take a great prophet to see that they will *be* the center some day. For all its fine qualities, the smirk is (after all) not an emotion for the long term.

In the meantime, America is a rich thriving country, where anyone who wants to paint can easily find a job doing something else; can easily get all the tools and materials he needs. What more could anyone ask than the means to keep trying?

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Rights for Rodents

Damon Linker

Not so long ago, animal-rights activists were viewed as crackpots if not thugs, the sort of people who splattered the fur coats of unsuspecting pedestrians with red paint or vandalized university research laboratories. This image was greatly enhanced by the extreme language in which the movement's leading figures routinely expressed themselves. Ingrid Newkirk, the longtime president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), once opined that "a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy"; on another memorable occasion, she offered the thought that whereas "six million Jews died in concentration camps, . . . six *billion* broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses."

In recent years, however, as some of the movement's most militant groups have moderated their rhetoric and their tactics, the cause of animal rights has begun to achieve a quite astonishing degree of respectability. On Capitol Hill, elected officials from both political parties have become receptive to the movement's concerns, sponsoring legislation and even forming a congressional caucus called the "Friends of Animals." Perhaps even more strikingly, some of the nation's leading law schools, including Harvard, Georgetown, and Rutgers, have begun to offer courses in animal-rights law, and a Washington firm founded by two veterans of Ralph Nader's consumer-advocacy group has begun regularly filing suit to expand legal protections for animals. Its most notable achievement is a landmark federal-court ruling in 1999 that for the first time gives an individual the legal standing to sue on behalf of a distressed creature.

But the biggest victory so far for the animal-rights movement came last October, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreed to settle a lawsuit filed by a group called the Alternatives Research and Development Foundation that was seeking to expand the scope of the Animal Welfare Act of 1966. Since its passage, this act had been interpreted as empowering the USDA to oversee the treatment in laboratory experiments of large animals like dogs, cats, and primates. Left out of this regulatory regime were birds and, most importantly, mice and rats, which account for 95 percent of all animals used in scientific tests.

Under last October's settlement—and despite the protests of indignant researchers—rodents are now to receive equal rights. The USDA has agreed to require universities, pharmaceutical companies, and other organizations that conduct biomedical experiments to fill out a report on the treatment of each and every warm-blooded animal, and to conduct random inspections to check for conformity to the new standards.

From the eagerness of politicians to please pet-owners to the all-too-familiar activism of the courts, one might point to all sorts of explanations for this dramatic change in the fortunes of the ani-

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mal-rights movement. But the most basic reason is simpler and more ominous: many Americans have begun to accept the activists' argument that there is a moral imperative to treat animals like, well, people.

THE FIRST leg of this argument concerns the capacity of animals to *feel*, and the definitive treatment of the question may be found in a book that helped launch the modern animal-rights movement. This was *Animal Liberation* (1975) by Peter Singer, the Australian professor of philosophy who, amid much controversy, was recently appointed to a prestigious chair in ethics at Princeton.

The power of Singer's book derives largely from the simplicity of its argument. Following the lead of the 19th-century utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, Singer begins by identifying what he takes to be an indisputable moral intuition: we have an obligation not to inflict pain and suffering on creatures that are capable of experiencing them. Next, using a series of shockingly gory anecdotes, he shows that animals can and do experience these sensations. Finally, and completing his syllogism, he concludes that human beings must not inflict pain and suffering on animals.

Much of *Animal Liberation* is concerned with applying this principle to various human practices—from the use of animals in scientific experiments to raising and slaughtering them on "factory farms"—and then advocating the radical reformation or abolition of those practices. As Singer writes with characteristic bluntness, "there can be no reason . . . for refusing to extend the basic principle of equality of [ethical] consideration to members of other species." In this scheme, the dominion of humans over animals resembles nothing so much as a "tyranny" based on "arbitrary discrimination."

Indeed, in a parallel that shows up repeatedly in his subsequent writings and those of his many admirers, Singer compares the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on animals to "that which resulted from the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans." Just as slavery was based on racism, the abusive treatment of animals rests on what he calls "speciesism"—a prejudice "in favor of the interests of members of one's own species." Those who ignore the suffering of animals rely on the same sort of "difference that the most crude and overt kind of racist uses in attempting to justify racial discrimination."

For Singer, in short, only a complete break from the anthropocentric views of Western philosophy and religion will allow us to see that when it comes to the all-important capacity to experience pleasure and pain, we are morally indistinguishable from many of our fellow creatures.

STEVEN WISE'S *Rattling the Cage* (2000) is perhaps the best-known book representing a relatively new tack in the project begun by Singer. He, too, offers an anguished cry of protest, again equating the present-day treatment of animals with human enslavement and describing the use of animals for medical research as "genocide." But for Wise, who teaches the new course in animal-rights law at Harvard and is a tireless courtroom advocate for the cause, the essential similarity between men and (some) beasts is *autonomy*: that is, the shared ability to form preferences and act on them.

Scientists, Wise points out, have demonstrated important physiological parallels between human beings and the primates that are his chief concern in *Rattling the Cage*. Chimpanzees, for instance, not only share 98.3 percent of our genetic make-up, but they have similar brain structures as well. On the evidence of evolutionary theory, he declares, "as recently as 5 or 6 million years ago, humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos were the same animal."

As a result, Wise argues, chimpanzees and bonobos possess myriad attributes that, through a combination of ignorance and prideful prejudice, we normally associate solely with human beings. They "feel" and "think," exhibit "emotions" and live in "cultures," "understand cause-and-effect relationships among objects, and even relationships among relationships." More importantly, observation of these animals in captivity and in the wild reveals that their behavior echoes ours in striking ways. They seem to possess elementary self-awareness: they imitate one another, engage in deception and trickery, and use their own primitive languages to communicate basic information and emotional states. A chimpanzee named Lucy even regularly prepared tea for researchers and masturbated to pictures of naked men in *Playgirl* magazine.

Contrary to Western prejudices that trace back to the Bible and Aristotle, Wise concludes, animals—or at least chimpanzees and bonobos—are not simply "things" that can be treated as property. They are, instead, "persons" in the legal sense. Like us, that is, they are bearers of individual rights and deserve to be treated accordingly. As the renowned primatologist Jane Goodall puts it in her glowing foreword to *Rattling the Cage*, this book is meant to be the animals' "Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, and Universal Declaration of Rights all in one."

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That such arguments have found an audience at this particular cultural moment is not so hard to explain. Our popular and elite media are saturated with scientific and quasi-scientific reports claiming to prove the basic thesis of the animal-rights movement. Having once believed ourselves to be made in the image of God, we now learn—from the human genome project, the speculations of evolutionary psychologists, and numerous other sources—that humankind, too, is determined by genetic predispositions and the drive to reproduce. We are cleverer than other animals, to be sure, but the difference is one of degree, not of kind. As Verlyn Klinkenborg recently wrote on the editorial page of the *New York Times*, "Again and again, after starting from an ancient premise of radical differences between humans and other creatures, scientists have discovered profound similarities."

But have they? Genetics and evolutionary biology may be, indeed, extremely effective at identifying the traits we share with other species. But chemistry, for its part, can tell us about the ways in which we resemble chunks of charcoal, and physics can point to fundamental similarities between a man and all the matter in the universe. The problem with these observations is not that they are untrue. It is that they shed no light whatsoever on, or rather they are designed to obfuscate, what makes humanity *unique* as a species—the point on which an answer to the likes of Peter Singer and Steven Wise must hinge.

For his part, Singer commits the same error that John Stuart Mill found in the system of Jeremy Bentham: he makes no distinction among *kinds* of pleasure and pain. That animals feel emotions can hardly be doubted; but human beings experience life, even at its most "animalistic" level, in a way that fundamentally differs from other creatures.

Thus, Singer can account for the pain that humans and animals alike experience when they are hungry and the pleasure they feel when they eat, but he cannot explain, for example, a person's choice to starve himself for a cause. He understands that human beings, like animals, derive pleasure from sex and sometimes endure pangs of longing when they are deprived of it, but he cannot explain how or why, unlike animals, some choose to embrace celibacy for the sake of its noble purity. He is certainly attuned to the tendency we share with animals to fear and avoid pain and bodily harm, but he is incapable of understanding a man's willingness to face certain death on the battlefield when called upon to do so by his country. Still less can he explain why stories of such sacrifice sometimes move us to tears.

In much the same way, the evidence adduced by Steven Wise to suggest that primates are capable of forming rudimentary plans and expectations fails to demonstrate they are equal to human beings in any significant sense. Men and women use their "autonomy" in a world defined not by the simple imperatives of survival but by ideas of virtue and vice, beauty and ugliness, right and wrong. Modern scientific methods, including those of evolutionary psychology, have so far proved incapable of detecting and measuring this world, but that does not make any less real the experience that takes place within it.

Western civilization has tended to regard animals as resembling things more than human beings precisely because, like inanimate objects, and unlike the authors of the real Magna Carta, animals have no perception of morality. Until the day when a single animal stands up and, led by a love of justice and a sense of self-worth, insists that the world recognize and respect its dignity, all the philosophical gyrations of the activists will remain so much sophistry.

None of this, of course, exempts human beings from behaving decently toward animals, but it does provide a foundation, when necessary, for giving pride of place to the interests of human beings. This has particular relevance for biomedical research.

Among the most vociferous critics of the USDA's recent capitulation to the animal-rights movement were the nation's leading centers of medical science. The National Association for Biomedical Research estimated that the new regulations would cost universities alone as much as $280 million a year. Nor is the issue simply one of dollars. As Estelle Fishbein, counsel for Johns Hopkins University, recently argued in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*,

> Genetic research promises to bring new therapies to alleviate human suffering from the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, Parkinson's disease and other neurological diseases, and virtually all other human and animal diseases. However, the promise of this new era of medical research is highly dependent on the ready availability of mice, rats, and birds.

Far from being a mere administrative hassle, she concluded, the new regulations would "divert scarce grant funds from actual research use, distract researchers from their scientific work, and overload them with documentation requirements."

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Serious as this threat is, a still more troubling one is the effect that the arguments of animal-rights proponents may have, in the long term, on our regard for human life itself. Peter Singer's appointment at Princeton caused a stir not because of his writings about animals but because of his endorsement of euthanasia, unrestricted abortion, and, in some instances, infanticide. But all of his views, as he himself maintains, are of a piece. The idea that "human infants and retarded adults" are superior to animals can only be based, he writes, on "a bare-faced—and morally indefensible—prejudice for members of our own species."

In much the same way, Steven Wise urges us to reject absolute demarcations between species and instead focus on the capacities of individual humans and individual apes. If we do that, we will find that many adult chimpanzees and bonobos are far more "human" than newborn and mentally disabled human beings, and thus just as worthy of being recognized as "persons."

Though Wise's inference is the opposite of Singer's—he does not wish to deprive underdeveloped humans of rights so much as to extend those rights to primates—he is playing the same game of bait-and-switch: in this case projecting the noblest human attributes onto animals while quietly limiting his sample of human beings to newborns and the mentally disabled. When raising animals to our level proves to be impossible, as it inevitably must, equal consideration can only be won by attempting to lower us to theirs.

IT IS a curious fact that in virtually all of human history, only in liberal democracies—societies founded on the recognition of the innate dignity of all members of the human race—have animals enjoyed certain minimum protections, codified in our own country in the Animal Welfare Act. It is a no less curious fact that these same liberal democracies have become infected over the past decades with a corrosive self-doubt, giving rise in some educated circles to antiliberal, antiwhite, antimale, anti-Western, and now, with perfect logic, antihuman enthusiasms.

The proponents of these various but linked ideologies march under a banner of justice and the promise of extending the blessings of equality to one or more excluded Others. Such piety is to be expected in a radical movement seeking well-meaning allies; but it need not deflect us from the main focus of their aggressive passions, which the euthanasia-endorsing Peter Singer, for one, has at least had the candor to admit to. Can anyone really doubt that, were the misanthropic agenda of the animal-rights movement actually to succeed, the result would be an *increase* in man's inhumanity, to man and animal alike? In the end, fostering our age-old "prejudice" in favor of human dignity may be the best thing we can do for animals, not to mention for ourselves.

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OBSERVATIONS

"Traffic" and the War on Drugs

Gary Rosen

SINCE THE late 1960's, when Hollywood began turning them out with some regularity, movies about drugs have tended to follow one of two basic formulas. Some have tried to capture, with varying degrees of realism, the actual experience of drug use, with results ranging from psychedelic celebrations like the countercultural "classic," *Easy Rider* (1969), to jarring cautionary tales like *Trainspotting* (1996). More widely seen, and more commercially successful, have been the countless movies—*The French Connection* (1971), *Midnight Express* (1978), *Scarface* (1983), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Lethal Weapon* (1987), *Clear and Present Danger* (1994)—that have used the spectacular violence and profit of the illegal drug trade as a backdrop for conventional dramatic or action fare.

Traffic, the new film by the director Steven Soderbergh, borrows elements from both of these tried-and-true forms, but in the service of a much more ambitious goal. Inspired by a miniseries that aired on British television in 1989, *Traffic* weaves together three loosely intersecting story-lines into a portrait that, in the end, is less about any of the film's characters than about the drug problem as a whole, from its impact on families to its place in our national politics. As Soderbergh told his screenwriter, "I want it big. I want to do an epic."

Nor is the point of this broad cinematic canvas merely descriptive. As a number of critics have emphasized in their acclaim for *Traffic*—the New York Film Critics Circle crowned it the best picture of 2000, and it may well win the Academy Award after this article goes to press—the movie's merits are not just of the artistic variety. *Traffic*, they insist, carries a sorely needed message. For Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek*, it effectively dramatizes "the basic staleness of our national debate on drug policy." In the *New York Times*, Stephen Holden praised its "coolly scathing overview of the multibillion-dollar drug trade and the largely futile war being waged against it," a view echoed, if more bluntly, by a writer for the on-line magazine *Salon*, who found the movie a refreshing declaration that the war on drugs is "all bullshit."

No less pleased by *Traffic* have been the advocates of legalizing—or, as they prefer, "decriminalizing"—drugs. The Lindesmith Center, whose primary backer, the billionaire George Soros, has funded ballot initiatives across the country aimed at repealing various drug laws, has even devoted a state-of-the-art website to the film, complete with a video game and prizes. As Ethan Nadelmann, the group's executive director, explained, "The movie got people stirred up and got them thinking—we hope to inspire them to get involved."

EACH OF *Traffic*'s three narratives takes place in a different locale. The first, in Mexico, centers on a principled Tijuana policeman named Javier Rodriguez (Benicio Del Toro), whose success in combating local traffickers wins him a place by the side of the country's leading drug-fighter, General Salazar (Tomas Milian), the head of the federal police. When Salazar turns out to be the corrupt tool of a leading cocaine ring, the disillusioned Rodriguez

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becomes an informant for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), but not before his partner, intent on enriching himself by doing the same, is discovered by Salazar's men and brutally murdered.

Meanwhile, across the border in suburban San Diego, Helena Ayala (Catherine Zeta-Jones), a wealthy, pregnant housewife, returns from her posh country club one day to find that her husband, a legitimate businessman as far as she knows, has been arrested by the DEA—and that he is, in fact, the region's chief cocaine distributor. Once over the shock, she quickly takes control of her husband's criminal empire, going so far, finally, as to arrange the assassination of the chief witness against him.

As these events unfold on the front lines of the illegal drug trade, a rigidly conservative Ohio judge named Robert Wakefield (Michael Douglas) prepares to take his first trip to Washington as the President's newly appointed drug "czar." Unknown to him, however, his baby-faced, high-achieving prep-school daughter, Caroline (Erika Christensen), has begun to use drugs, graduating quickly from marijuana to crack cocaine. Shaken by Caroline's descent into addiction, and by his own helplessness to prevent it, Wakefield eventually resigns his new office and returns home to help her undergo treatment.

Though the three parts of *Traffic* occasionally overlap, it is never for more than a moment, just long enough, for instance, for General Salazar to declare his eagerness to cooperate to the credulous Judge Wakefield, or for the policeman Javier and the drug baroness Helena to cross paths at the U.S.-Mexico border. Indeed, a notable achievement of the film is that, despite its length (almost two-and-a-half-hours) and fast-paced cuts between largely unconnected plots, it moves along with great energy and coherence. The key to this accomplished story-telling is the distinctive look that Soderbergh (who doubled as the cinematographer) has imparted to each of the three narratives: the sequences in Mexico are in sepia tones, brightly lit and grainy, with the feel of an amateur documentary; San Diego appears in an almost surreal brightness and clarity; and the environs of Judge Wakefield, in both Ohio and Washington, are invariably bathed in cool blues and darkness.

Strong, too, is the overall quality of the enormous cast of *Traffic*, which features more than 100 speaking parts. Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones, the film's marquee stars, give competent if unremarkable performances, but they are upstaged by two lesser known actors, Benicio Del Toro as the stoical, slow-speaking Mexican cop and Erika Christensen, who brings the perfect combination of insecurity and sulky arrogance to the role of a spoiled, drug-addled teenager.

Given the nature of big Hollywood productions, *Traffic*'s failings as a movie are predictable enough. Characters undergo wildly implausible transformations—from suburban matron to vicious drug lord, from blazer-wearing schoolgirl to trick-turning crack whore—in the blink of an eye. And the plot itself depends too often on drug-movie clichés: a distraught father searching the ghetto for his troubled daughter, cops waging a losing battle to protect a key government witness, third-world officials secretly serving the interests of an all-powerful drug syndicate.

All the same, *Traffic* is, as such things go, an engaging and original film, the sort of entertainment one wishes the movie industry produced more often.

THIS IS so despite the fact that *Traffic* is also a sophisticated bit of propaganda on behalf of the drug-legalization movement, or at least is decidedly in its corner. For obvious reasons, those associated with the movie have tried to emphasize what they see as its evenhandedness ("If we've done our jobs right," Soderbergh has said, "everybody will be pissed off.") And there are in fact a few sops in *Traffic* to those who take a harder line: two courageous DEA agents, the foot soldiers in the war on drugs, are perhaps the most endearing and attractive characters in the film; Judge Wakefield, at a Georgetown cocktail party, hears the advice of such conservative stalwarts (in cameo appearances) as Senators Orrin Hatch and Don Nickles; and the ordeal of young Caroline Wakefield, far from glamorizing drug use, shows its often hideous consequences.

But none of this interferes with *Traffic*'s clear intent to argue that U.S. antidrug policy is an abject failure, focused wrongheadedly on supply rather than demand and depending exclusively on the crude tools of law enforcement. Sometimes this message finds expression in awkward speechifying: at one point, for instance, an arrested drug operative informs DEA agents, "Your whole life is pointless. You realize the futility of what you're doing and you do it anyway." The same message is delivered, with much the same thud, by Caroline Wakefield's cocky, drug-supplying boyfriend, who, dragged to an inner-city crack house by her angry father, lectures him, "It's an unbeatable market force, man."

More often, however, and to its makers' credit, *Traffic* pursues its ideological ends by more dramatic means. Particularly effective is the striking difference in look and style between the scenes in Mexico and those centering on Judge Wakefield. The drug war south of the border is presented almost hyperrealistically, its corruption and violence given verisimilitude by the choppy, unpolished, overexposed way in which it is filmed. In the policy circles of the U.S., by contrast, all is dark and cold and steady, matching the illusion of control that prevails there.

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Indeed, it is the story of Judge Wakefield's enlightenment—his gradual "waking," as his name announces—that gives *Traffic* its didactic force. At every turn, he confronts the impossibility of his assignment. His predecessor as drug czar confides that his own efforts have probably not "made the slightest difference." In El Paso, at a high-tech anti-trafficking intelligence center, he is told that the government cannot begin to fight the cartels, with their "unlimited budget." When he asks his top aides to "think outside the box" about the drug problem—the "dam is open for new ideas," he volunteers—they fall completely silent.

But it is the harrowing experience of trying to rescue his own daughter that finally shakes Judge Wakefield from his complacency. At his first White House press conference, he starts to describe his own "ten-point plan" to "win the war on drugs," only to break off in mid-speech. "I can't do this," he tells the reporters. "If there is a war on drugs, then many of our family members are the enemy, and I don't know how you can wage a war against your own family." And with that, he hurries from the stage and out the door.

In his final scene, Wakefield—whose first appearance in the movie found him perched high on his bench, sternly admonishing a drug defendant's lawyer—sits humbly alongside his wife at his daughter's support group. "We're here," he says, "to listen." Nor is there any ambiguity about the lesson he must learn. As one of Caroline's fellow addicts declares, drug abuse is "a disease, an allergy of the mind"—or, as Stephen Gaghan, the film's screenwriter (and himself a recovering addict), told the *New York Times*, "drugs should be considered a health-care issue rather than a criminal issue."

THAT THERE is a point to some of what *Traffic* is saying need not be denied. Most informed observers would concede that our decades-long campaign against illegal drug use has been less than a triumph. Nor is it especially controversial to suggest that certain methods have proved ineffective, or overly harsh, while others have not been employed nearly enough.

Last year, in response to charges of abuse, Congress made it more difficult for federal law-enforcement officials to seize, before trial, assets suspected of being tainted by drug money. More recently, commentators and public officials from across the political spectrum have raised doubts about the federal government's $1.3-billion aid package for Colombia's antidrug fight, as well as about the "mandatory minimum" sentences under which so many petty drug offenders are now serving time.

As for efforts at prevention and treatment, which *Traffic* suggests have been scanted, the most recent real-world drug czar, Barry R. McCaffrey, left office having overseen substantial increases in federal spending in both areas, and candidate George W. Bush pledged to spend a billion dollars in new funds for programs aimed at helping addicts come clean. The last five years have also witnessed a proliferation of specialized drug courts, which divert some nonviolent drug offenders to closely monitored programs of testing and treatment rather than just packing them off to prison.

Welcome as these reformist gestures may be, however, they should not obscure the substantial long-term progress that *has* been made against the use of illegal drugs—progress attributable in some measure to generational change but in no small part to the supposedly "failed" policies that are the target of *Traffic*. Not only has drug-related crime, like every other sort of crime, dropped substantially in recent years, but the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse shows an unmistakably positive overall trend. Half as many Americans now smoke marijuana as did in 1979, and a third as many use cocaine. During the same period, the number of users of any illicit drug fell from well over 25 million to under 15 million.

Such figures, needless to say, still point to a significant problem, a problem made more worrisome by recent slight increases of reported drug use among both teenagers and adults. But there is no reason to think that matters would improve—and a number of reasons to think they would grow considerably worse—by reversing course entirely and adopting the approach implicitly endorsed by *Traffic* and more forthrightly proclaimed by its friends in the drug-legalization movement.

IF LEGAL sanctions against drug use were greatly relaxed or abolished altogether, one of the first casualties would undoubtedly be effective programs of treatment. As former drug czar William J. Bennett observed recently in the *Washington Post* (responding, it should be noted, to an attack against him in an interview given by *Traffic*'s Stephen Gaghan):

> One clear fact . . . is that success in treatment is a function of time in treatment. And time in treatment is often a function of coercion—being forced into treatment by a loved one, an employer, or, as is often the case, the legal system. . . . If we treat drug use as a purely medical problem, and treatment as something that can be only voluntarily taken up, fewer people will enter treatment—and those who enter treatment are less likely to get well.

Among the policies that could not survive such a change would be the promising, and widely discussed, proposal of drug-policy expert Mark Kleiman of UCLA to use regular drug-testing to impose "coerced abstinence" on parolees and probationers, who comprise the most intractable and dangerous population of drug users.

Moreover, by reducing both the cost and stigma of drug use, legalization in any meaningful form

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would inevitably result in a far greater number of users—and addicts. Proponents of ending drug "prohibition" often speak of the advantages of moving toward a system more akin to the one we have long had for beer, wine, and liquor: as Caroline Wakefield duly, if implausibly, claims at one point in *Traffic*, "for someone my age, it's a lot easier to get drugs than to get alcohol." But the fact remains that while over 80 percent of American high-school seniors have used alcohol, only some 10 percent have tried LSD or cocaine. When it comes to discouraging experimentation with hazardous substances, there is a world of difference between an age limit and an outright ban.*

Traffic may give a temporary boost to those who wish, despite these risks, to do away with an antidrug regime that has served the country reasonably well and, with modifications, might serve it still better in the future. In the movie's favor, one might hope that it finally prompts politicians and policy-makers to retire the overused, and inappropriate, metaphor of a "war on drugs." Wars tend to be discrete events, decided in a few mighty confrontations. With illegal drugs, the important struggles are abiding ones, requiring not dramatic action but steadiness and resolve.

* For an illuminating and wide-ranging discussion of the likely effects of removing the criminal sanctions on drugs, see James Q. Wilson's "Against the Legalization of Drugs," COMMENTARY, February 1990.

MUSIC

Whatever Happened to Bing Crosby

Terry Teachout

FOR VIRTUALLY any American over the age of sixty, Bing Crosby's name is likely to evoke a wide range of memories. Though he was by far the best-known popular singer of the pre-rock era, Crosby was also a full-fledged movie star who won a best-actor Oscar for *Going My Way* (1944) and easily held his own opposite the likes of Fred Astaire and Bob Hope in such lighter fare as *Holiday Inn* (1942) and *The Road to Morocco* (1942). His radio shows were no less successful, and with the arrival of TV in the 50's, his face became as familiar a fixture in American homes as was his easygoing bass-baritone voice.

TERRY TEACHOUT, COMMENTARY's *music critic and a contributor to* Time *magazine, is finishing* H.L. Mencken: A Life.

Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, the first installment of a two-volume biography by the jazz critic Gary Giddins,* contains a list of statistics conveying something of the extent to which Crosby once dominated American popular culture. According to Giddins:

- He made more recordings than any other singer, of which 38 were number-one hits, more than any other popular artist. (The Beatles, by contrast, topped the charts only 24 times.)
- By 1980, he had sold a total of 400 million discs.
- He was one of Hollywood's top ten box-office attractions in America in fifteen different years between 1934 and 1954.
- His best-known radio program, NBC's *Kraft Music Hall*, reached an audience of as many as 50 million listeners—at the time, well over a third of the entire U.S. population.

But Crosby's fame did not long survive his death in 1977. Indeed, it is now difficult to find anyone under the age of forty who knows anything specific about him other than that he recorded Irving Berlin's "White Christmas." By and large his work is available only on hard-to-find CD's released by independent European labels, while most of his films are long forgotten. A four-CD box set containing a representative but not always musically satisfying cross-section of Crosby's

* Little, Brown, 728 pp., $30.00. The volume's subtitle is "The Early Years, 1903-1940."

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recordings for Decca is currently the only large-scale reissue on a major American label.* (It can be purchased online by viewing this article on Commentary's website, www.commentarymagazine.com.) The only single-CD compilation of the best of Crosby's important early recordings is *Bing Crosby: 1926-1932* (Timeless CBC1-004), an impeccably produced Dutch import which is poorly distributed in this country but can sometimes be obtained online from www.worldsrecords.com, a mail-order firm that also stocks a wide assortment of other Crosby reissues on independent labels.

Though several other artists of his generation—Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Benny Goodman among them—continue to be widely recognized as key figures in American music, Crosby tends increasingly to be overlooked by critics and journalists. He was, for instance, omitted entirely from Ken Burns's ten-part PBS series *Jazz*, and is mentioned only in passing in Geoffrey C. Ward's companion volume to the series.

How could so bright a star have dimmed so fast? Was there less to Bing Crosby than met the ear? Gary Giddins thinks not, and in *A Pocketful of Dreams* he makes the case for Crosby in unprecedentedly rich and rewarding detail. Though certain chapters could have been trimmed to useful effect (many readers will feel, for example, that far too much space is devoted to Crosby's less important films), the book as a whole is both finely written and thoroughly engrossing. Still, in telling the story of how Crosby became "a phenomenon in the cultural life of the United States," *A Pocketful of Dreams* occasionally dwells on the phenomenon at the expense of the artist.

Giddins is not himself a musician, trained or otherwise; for all his evident appreciation of Crosby's singing, he lacks the technical knowledge needed to explain fully what he is hearing. And though his discussion of the posthumous decline in Crosby's reputation is plausible as far as it goes, he is similarly unable to supply a completely adequate *musical* explanation for why "the most influential and successful popular performer in the first half of the 20th century" should have faded into semi-obscurity a mere quarter-century after his death.

Born in 1903 in Tacoma, Washington, Harry Lillis Crosby, Jr., was the fourth of seven children of a charming but lazy bookkeeper and a cold, manipulative woman who demanded that, unlike their ne'er-do-well father, her children get ahead in the world. The Crosbys moved to Spokane in 1905, and Bing (he acquired his nickname because of his liking for *The Bingville Bugle*, a humorous newspaper supplement of the time) spent eight years attending the Jesuit-run Gonzaga High School and University, where he received a Catholic-style classical education, doing well at both Greek and Latin.

Crosby's background explains much about the complicated man he became. The happy-go-lucky "regular guy" who bantered amiably on screen with Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour was in real life highly intelligent and well-read (in a 50's interview, he casually mentioned having recently read novels by James Gould Cozzens, John P. Marquand, and Evelyn Waugh). He remained a practicing Catholic his whole life long and would always be modest to a fault about his musical gifts. But he was also an acutely self-aware artist with an unrelenting will, who from adolescence onward hid his vaulting ambitions behind an iron mask of affability.

One observer who saw through Crosby's façade was the clarinetist and bandleader Artie Shaw, who watched him up close in the radio studios:

> Bing was never a matinee idol. He developed a screen personality that worked because it was based on who he wanted to be—casual, relaxed. But it was a tense sort of relaxing because you knew he was working at it. Bing wasn't Bing any more than [Humphrey] Bogart was Bogart.

For all the warmth of Crosby's public personality, his family and friends found him distant and enigmatic. According to his younger brother Bob, a singer who fronted one of the best big bands of the swing era, he "built a cellophane bag and sealed himself inside and didn't let anyone inside because [people] knew he was shy and that he couldn't say no." Apparently as a way of coping with his anxieties, he went on periodic alcoholic binges, a habit that would soon put his reputation—as well as his voice—at risk, though he finally brought it under control.

Crosby's academic education came to an abrupt halt when he fell in love with popular music. Though his only training was a handful of singing lessons he had taken as a teenager, he had great natural ability and a quick and retentive musical memory, making it possible for him to learn new songs easily even though he could not read music. His rise to stardom was astonishingly fast: he quit school in 1924 to sing professionally, and within two years he had joined the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, the first full-time singer ever to be hired by a major dance band.

Contrary to widespread critical belief, the Whiteman band was one of the most musically advanced ensembles of the 20's. In it, Crosby worked side by side with such innovative artists as the cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, the bassist Steve Brown, the guitarist Eddie Lang, and the arranger Bill Challis. He also began to listen closely to the playing and singing of Louis Armstrong, the most important figure in early jazz,

* *Bing: His Legendary Years, 1931 to 1957* (MCA MCAD4-10887).

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whose rhythmic forcefulness and flexibility were then having an incalculably large impact on other young jazz musicians (and who in turn would later emulate Crosby's distinctive ballad style).

While Crosby's singing reflected all these influences, the overall effect was wholly individual: nobody sounded quite like him. It helped that the voice itself was inimitable, a resonant, virile-sounding baritone with a range of nearly two octaves, from low G to high F, and a warm, attractively husky timbre that Armstrong likened to "gold being poured out of a cup."*

But it was what Crosby *did* with his voice that made him stand out. Prior to the 20's, American popular singing was theatrical in style: singers had to make themselves heard over pit orchestras without benefit of amplification, a circumstance that forced them to employ vocal techniques not unlike those of opera singers. As it happens, Crosby's voice was naturally large enough to have permitted him to sing that way: Kitty Carlisle, an actress with classical vocal training, heard him in person for the first time in 1934 and was startled by "his technique, his effortlessness, the fact that his voice was so much bigger and more available for, really, operatic roles than [what] you saw at the movies."

Instead, he chose another path. With the coming of electrical recording in 1925, small-voiced, effete-sounding tenors had briefly become fashionable. But Crosby swept them away with a style that was forthrightly masculine yet intimate in scale. Thanks to his canny use of the microphone, he could sing as if he were speaking—and not to a large audience, either, but to just one person at a time.

MUSICALLY, CROSBY combined Armstrong's infallible swing with Beiderbecke's lyricism. Such early 78 sides as "I'm Coming, Virginia" (1927), "Ol' Man River" (1928), and "Make Believe" (1928) show him to have been astonishingly light on his rhythmic feet, more so than any singer of the period besides Armstrong. He reworked melodies with the self-assurance of a master improviser, adding ornaments and altering rhythms as his fancy dictated, and his "scat" singing (the made-up nonsense syllables popularized by Armstrong), heard to especially good advantage on the electrifying version of "St. Louis Blues" he recorded with Duke Ellington's band in 1932, was wonderfully bold.

The young Bing Crosby was, in short, a jazz singer, arguably the first one after Louis Armstrong, and without question one of the best who ever lived. He was also, as Giddins correctly points out, "the first great ballad singer in jazz. . . . His sound had little precedent: rich, strong, masculine, and clean."

By 1931, Crosby had left the Whiteman band and the Rhythm Boys, the vocal trio with which he had been featured during his years with Whiteman, and embarked on a solo career. In that year he began to appear in short subjects directed by Mack Sennett, the king of movie slapstick, thereby revealing himself to be a natural comedian, and was hired by CBS to star in his own radio show, *Fifteen Minutes with Bing Crosby*.

Crosby's movies and radio appearances advertised his recordings, which began to sell in vast quantities, and within two years he was so successful that he was able to stop performing in public altogether. Between 1933 and 1975, the only crowds he sang for were the studio audiences invited to watch his radio shows. Dozens of other pop singers based their styles on his, among them Russ Columbo, Perry Como, Bob Eberle, Billy Eckstine, Dick Haymes, and Dean Martin. "All the singers tried to be Crosbys," one of them wryly admitted. "You were either a high Crosby or a low Crosby." At the age of thirty, Bing Crosby had become (in Duke Ellington's words) "the biggest thing, ever."

BUT THE ultimate basis for Crosby's superstardom—his voice—was proving to be perilously fragile. He had long had problems with laryngitis (an attack of which forced him to postpone his highly publicized network radio debut for two days), and many of the records he was making in the late 20's and early 30's reveal a hoarseness in the upper register which, though part of his appeal, was also an unmistakable sign of strain.

Late in 1931, a doctor warned Crosby that he had developed a node (a hard blister) on one of his vocal cords, thus rendering him particularly susceptible to laryngitis. Surgery was impossible: it might alter the quality of his voice unpredictably and permanently. The only treatment was complete vocal rest, but, Crosby having just reached the peak of his early stardom, that, too, was out of the question. He kept on singing—and drinking to excess, thereby doing further damage.

According to Giddins, Crosby's difficulties cured themselves over time. But to listeners familiar with the long-term consequences of faulty vocal technique, his records tell a different story. Though his natural tessitura was that of a low baritone, he had an upper extension that he used freely in the late 20's and early 30's, casually tossing off high E's and F's. But because he had no formal training, he never learned how to negotiate safely the "break" leading to his upper register, and a combination of overwork, drink, and flawed technique gradually weakened that part of his voice.

Crosby's 1931 recording of Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" provides a dramatic illustration of the risks

* The mutual admiration of the two men, who worked together frequently in radio and motion pictures, was both genuine and endearing. Crosby called Armstrong "the beginning and the end of music in America," while Armstrong's praise for Crosby was no less emphatic: "The man was a *Natural Genius* the day he was born. Ever since Bing first opened his mouth, he was the *Boss of All Singers* and Still is."

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he was taking. It is one of his most famous recordings, and deservedly so: his youthful ballad style, vibrant and robust, is heard here in all its golden glory. But he is also audibly hoarse, and he sings the repeated high E's of the chorus in a wide-open, "uncovered" voice that any competent teacher would immediately have spotted as a recipe for disaster.

Predictably, Crosby had another vocal crisis in 1932, and was told to "rest and don't even answer the phone—don't talk, don't do anything." Instead, he took a ten-day break, then resumed his busy schedule. Giddins mentions this episode in passing, apparently not realizing that it marked a turning point in the singer's career, the moment when he began irreversibly to "lose his top." Though he continued to sing full-voiced high F's on record as late as 1935, they became fewer and farther between, and songs that he might once have performed in the key of F, such as "June in January" and "With Every Breath I Take" (both 1934), were transposed down a full step, to E flat. Nor was the change limited to his upper register: by 1935, his voice had grown darker in timbre and heavier in texture from top to bottom.

As Crosby lost his high notes and settled into a less demanding bass-baritone range, he also changed his style. Not only did he abandon the jazzy scat singing of his young years, he seemed almost to lose interest in jazz itself. Though he was always capable of unlimbering for such frisky novelties as Johnny Mercer's "I'm an Old Cowhand" (1936) and "Bob White (Whatcha Gonna Swing Tonight?)" (1937, with Connie Boswell), he now concentrated on ballads, which he sang with a quiet warmth well suited to his deeper range.

By this time, Crosby was recording for Decca, a new label whose chief producer, Jack Kapp, had encouraged him to explore a repertoire better suited to the tastes of "the masses." Kapp assured Crosby that by shunning "'hot' songs" and concentrating instead on a wide-ranging mixture of contemporary ballads, prewar standards (like "I Love You Truly" and "Let Me Call You Sweetheart"), collaborations with other popular Decca artists like the Andrews Sisters, and ethnic novelties ranging from country to Hawaiian music, he could attain a degree of popularity "as great as ever enjoyed by any singer in this country. You have in your grasp," Kapp added, invoking the name of the astonishingly successful Irish tenor, "the opportunity to be the John McCormack of this generation."

Crosby unhesitatingly took Kapp's advice, and the results were just as predicted. By the 40's, he was more than a pop singer, more than a movie star. Instead, he became, as Giddins rightly says, a member of the family: "No other pop icon has ever been so thoroughly, lovingly *liked*—liked and trusted. . . . His was the voice of the nation, the cannily informal personification of hometown decency—friendly, unassuming, melodious, irrefutably American."

But Crosby paid a high price for allowing Jack Kapp to turn him into the musical equivalent of a Norman Rockwell *Saturday Evening Post* cover. Jazz is not an absolute value, and the fact that Crosby's new style was less explicitly "jazzy" did not necessarily make it less good. (Nat "King" Cole, for example, became a better singer when he gave up jazz piano to concentrate on ballads.) The problem with the new Crosby was that his singing had become less vital, less compelling, less *interesting*. It was as though the loss of his high notes had also robbed him of his sense of musical adventure, his ability to surprise and delight the ear. The decline was not inexorable, and he would continue to make occasional memorable recordings well into the 1940's. For the most part, though, he was now singing—figuratively as well as literally—in a lower key.

Gary Giddins has mixed feelings about Crosby's change of style. "What his singing forfeited in muscularity," Giddins argues, "it gained in poignancy. . . . Bing in the mid-30's was the most quietly assured male pop singer alive." Yet he also admits that there was more to it than that:

> [I]n singling out McCormack as a career template and encouraging Bing to deflect hot songs, [Kapp] hoped to remake him as a smoother, less mannered, ultimately less expressive singer, a kind of musical comfort food. . . . [Crosby] was now on the verge of reinventing common-denominator aesthetics, creating a national popular music that pleased everyone. The cost, in the opinion of many observers, was encroaching blandness.

The strengths and weaknesses of the new Crosby can be heard in the great ballads he recorded during World War II. "What's New?" (Johnny Burke and Bob Haggart, 1939), "Skylark" (Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael, 1942), "It Could Happen to You" (Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen, 1943), "Long Ago and Far Away" (Ira Gershwin and Jerome Kern, 1944), and "Out of This World" (Cole Porter, 1944) rank high among the outstanding love songs of the decade, and Crosby sang them all with taste and sensitivity. But his interpretations seem almost detached, lacking the energy and ardor one might reasonably expect from a comparatively young man. To hear them is to be put in mind of Father O'Malley, the amiable priest Crosby played in the 1944 movie *Going My Way*. Like the good father himself, Bing Crosby in the 40's sounded pleasant, engaging, humorous—and celibate.

By the 50's, a new generation of Americans was transferring its musical loyalties to a very different kind of singer. Frank Sinatra started out as a "high Crosby," but quickly developed into something more: singing with the big band of Tom-

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my Dorsey, he brought to the ballads of the 40's a vulnerability that teenagers found irresistible. Like Crosby, he weathered a vocal crisis from which he emerged with a lower, darker voice, but it made him more rather than less interesting. The Sinatra of the 50's sang with a sharp edge of sexuality and aggression, while his youthful vulnerability deepened into a quality bordering at times on outright despair.

Sinatra's emotional candor stands in stark contrast to the impenetrable reserve of Crosby, who once famously told the lyricist Johnny Burke not to write songs for him that contained the phrase, "I love you." Unlike Sinatra, he was never a confessional artist, and the intensity he brought to his early recordings of ballads like "Stardust" was musical rather than dramatic. (To put it another way, he sang songs, not monologues.) Revealingly, he preferred the middle-of-the-road backing of John Scott Trotter's studio orchestras to the harder-swinging, harmonically sophisticated arrangements that Nelson Riddle created for such classic Sinatra albums of the 50's as *Songs for Swingin' Lovers* and *Only the Lonely*.

The 50's continue to be portrayed in the media as a decade of mindless conformity, but they were actually a time of considerable cultural volatility, nowhere more so than in popular music and jazz. While the comforting sound of Bing Crosby's balladry remained reassuring to many Americans, others were looking for something more emotionally challenging, and Sinatra's confessionalism, like the deceptively "cool" jazz of the trumpeter Miles Davis, suited their mood perfectly.

TO THE end of his life, Crosby continued to make records and appear on radio and TV, and he never lost his ability to swing. ("Bing had the beat, the absolute best time," said the drummer Jake Hanna. "You just followed him and he carried you right along.") But his way of making music had become unfashionable, and because the middle-aged Crosby was the only one whom younger listeners knew, they came to see him as a symbol of everything they held in contempt. As Giddins puts it:

> He was known to [the postwar generation] as a faded and not especially compelling celebrity, a square old man who made orange-juice commercials and appeared with his much younger family on Christmas telecasts that the baby boomers never watched. . . .They would have been amazed to learn how advanced, savvy, and forceful a musician he had been in his prime.

Fortunately, the other Bing Crosby—the greater Crosby—lives again in the first half of *A Pocketful of Dreams*, and on the best of the hundreds of records he made between 1927 and 1936. "As far as I am concerned," Crosby said in 1960, "with the exception of a phonograph record or two, I don't think I have done anything that's really outstanding or great or marvelous or anything that deserves any superlatives." In fact, he was a nonpareil jazz singer who has been unfairly written out of the history of the music he helped to shape, as well as a balladeer of magical sensitivity and irresistible vitality. In helping to restore him to life, and despite certain deficiencies in musical understanding, Gary Giddins has done an inestimable service to American music.

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Books in Review

Original Sin?

Constantine's Sword:
The Church and the Jews
by James Carroll
Houghton Mifflin. 756 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Robert S. Wistrich

THE TROUBLED 2,000-year history of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jews has been the subject of numerous treatments in the past four decades. Most of them, not surprisingly, have been highly critical of the painful record of Christian anti-Judaism that preceded and helped to pave the way for the Holocaust. More recently, the beatification of the notoriously anti-Jewish Pope Pius IX, the continuing efforts by some circles in the Vatican to canonize the wartime pontiff, Pius XII, and the publication last fall of *Dominus Jesus* (a declaration appearing to set the Catholic Church above all other religions) have thrown relations between Catholics and Jews into even sharper relief.

This new book by James Carroll, a novelist and columnist for the *Boston Globe*, adds an important dimension to the debate. An ex-priest and former chaplain to Boston University's Catholic community, Carroll has undertaken a long journey of moral reckoning with the theological anti-Semitism of the Church, and he here confronts the darkest corners of his faith in semi-autobiographical as well as historical terms. For him, this history is not only mortifying, it is gravely skewed and even sinful, and recent acts of repentance—from *We Remember*, an official Vatican statement on the Holocaust issued in 1998 to a papal apology offered in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome—have been seriously inadequate.

The title of Carroll's book recalls the 4th-century pagan Roman emperor, Constantine, whose vision of a great cross in the sky accompanied by the words, "By this sign shall you conquer," led to his conversion and the transformation of Christianity into the dominant religion of the Roman imperium. Ever since then, Carroll argues, Catholicism has been corrupted by its nexus with power, and has moved far from the original message of Jesus. The shadow of Constantinian imperialism, reinforced by medieval papalism, Counter-Reformation dogma, and 19th-century antimodernism, gave birth to a Christian triumphalism that has not yet disappeared from the contemporary landscape. And since its effects have fallen with special severity on the Jews, Carroll questions how a Church that has not even come to terms with its own complicity in the most terrible event of the 20th century can still continue to proclaim that there is only one way to salvation.

ONE OF the most unexpectedly topical chapters in Carroll's book—and one that offers a good glimpse into his passionate mode of argumentation—relates to the Temple

ROBERT S. WISTRICH, *who holds the Neuberger chair in modern Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is the author of* Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred. *His article, "The Pope, the Church, and the Jews," appeared in the April 1999 issue of* COMMENTARY.

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Mount in Jerusalem. To Jesus, who in Carroll's writing was a Jew to his core, this was the navel of the world, the site where God had touched the earth itself and which He had chosen as His dwelling place. Thus, Carroll rejects as wholly implausible the Gospel claim that Jesus came to the Temple to throw out the money-changers, or that he ever prophesied the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem itself.

Carroll's Jesus, instead, was a phylactery-wearing Jew who remained faithful to the God of Israel and fell victim to a totalitarian Roman war-machine that for more than a century had sought to crush the Jews of Judea. Yet the Romans, he reminds us, remain unindicted in the Gospel accounts—one of a web of multiple distortions woven into the primal Christian narratives that would feed anti-Semitism through the centuries. (Carroll is no less astringent on the "foundational Christian slander" that glibly contrasts the New Testament message of love, mercy, and forgiveness with the purportedly cruel, vengeful, and heartless God of the Hebrew Bible.)

In turning to the Middle Ages, Carroll, like many researchers before him, emphasizes the catastrophic results of a militarized Christianity after the First Crusade (1096), the devastating effects of the mid-14th-century Black Death with its accompanying accusation that Jews had poisoned the wells, and the paranoid delusions behind the blood libel that contributed in many countries to the demonization of the Jews. He concedes that the papacy did seek to protect Jews from mob violence, basing itself theologically on the Augustinian notion that—although "guilty" of deicide and condemned to permanent exile—the Jews were to be preserved as a (humiliated) witness to Christian truth. But while acknowledging the element of ambivalence, Carroll nevertheless shows that some of the greatest saints of the Church were among its worst Jew-haters—a point, he insists, that gives the lie to the recent Vatican claim that the Church *as such* cannot be guilty of sin.

Similarly, in his chapter on the Spanish Inquisition, Carroll contends that no hermetic wall divides traditional Christian anti-Judaism from modern racial anti-Semitism. The policy of defining Jews by "blood" infiltrated the Spanish Church and (along with an obsession with crypto-Jews) became a central part of its history, finding a ready echo in the 16th century with Pope Paul IV. At several points Carroll quotes the vivid remark of Cardinal Edward Cassidy that the Roman ghetto, established in Paul's day, was an antechamber to the death camps.

In approaching the modern period, Carroll links intensified Catholic anti-Semitism to moments of crisis in which the Roman Church, and its own domination of the faithful, came under threat. If this was true during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, it was even truer after the French Revolution and the movements for Italian national unity that led to the dismantling of the papal states. Henceforth, liberalism, nationalism, freemasonry, secularism, capitalism, and modernity itself would become the enemy, an enemy all too often embodied in Catholic eyes by the Jews. The emergence of political anti-Semitism in parts of Europe in the late 19th century afforded many Catholics yet another opportunity to revive the Church's declining fortunes. Hence the primary role played by the Catholic clergy in fin-de-siècle French anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus Affair—a kind of dress-rehearsal for fascism and Nazism.

IN RECOUNTING this long and bleak history, Carroll is hardly breaking new ground; from the nature of Jesus' mission to the response of the Church to modernity, others have had similar insights and come to similar conclusions. Still, although not trained as a historian, and although dismissive of clashing or more cautious interpretations, Carroll does get most of his history pretty much right. A notable exception is his relatively brief coverage of the Hitler period, which is characterized by some serious omissions and flaws.

Thus, for example, Carroll evinces no real appreciation of the deeply anti-Christian strain in Nazism; nor does he offer any detailed analysis of the *reasons* for the acquiescence of the German episcopate in Hitler's anti-Jewish policies. The objective limitations on what the papacy could do, the national and political contexts in which it had to operate, the very real danger of reprisal in the case of public protest—to do justice to these would require a more nuanced approach than Carroll is able or willing to provide.

Even so, however, he does make some strong points concerning the sheer scale of Catholic intellectual and tactical accommodation to the Third Reich, and he is scathing on current Vatican attempts to argue that Nazi "neopaganism" alone was responsible for the tragedy of the Holocaust. What seems clear enough is that Nazi anti-Semitism could never have aroused the response it did had it not been planted in groundwater poisoned by Christian theology—Protestant, it must be emphasized, as much as Catholic—and in a satanization of the Jews over many centuries.

ON ALL these matters, Carroll's vantage point is that of an unflinching moralist, thoroughly dissatisfied with the reckoning made by his own Church via-à-vis its treatment of the Jews. For him, it is virtually axiomatic that only a thorough cleansing of all vestiges of anti-Jewish hatred will enable the Church to reform itself. And what he has in mind in this regard is quite radical: a revised Christology, a reimagining of the meaning of the cross, and an open commitment to the values of

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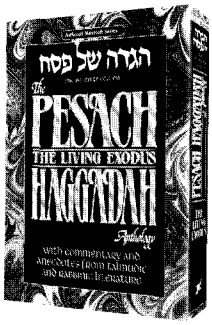

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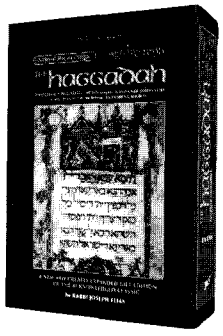

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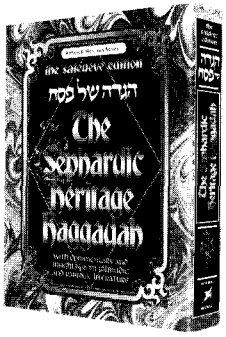

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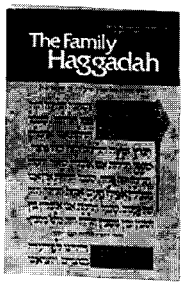

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religious pluralism and democracy. Indeed, Carroll suggests that Christians need to call into question the whole idea that God required the suffering and death of Jesus for their salvation, and must totally reject the ideology of supersessionism (that is, the Church's replacement of Israel as God's chosen instrument) and the portrayal of Judaism as Christianity's negative "other."

Here once again Carroll can be faulted, in this case for underplaying the extent to which the Catholic Church ever since Vatican II—and especially under continuous prodding by Pope John Paul II—has gone in the direction he urges. (He does call the Pope's leaving of a message of contrition and reconciliation in a crevice of the Western Wall in Jerusalem "the single most momentous act of his papacy.") Nor, curiously, does Carroll seem to realize that satisfying some of his theological demands would involve not a reformation of the Church but its virtual dissolution.

Still, despite occasional excesses, *Constantine's Sword* is marked by a basic integrity and honesty, and its intense style achieves often moving effects. Like one of his mentors, the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, Carroll has had the courage to ask difficult and painful questions, and to think with both mind and heart. That is no mean achievement.

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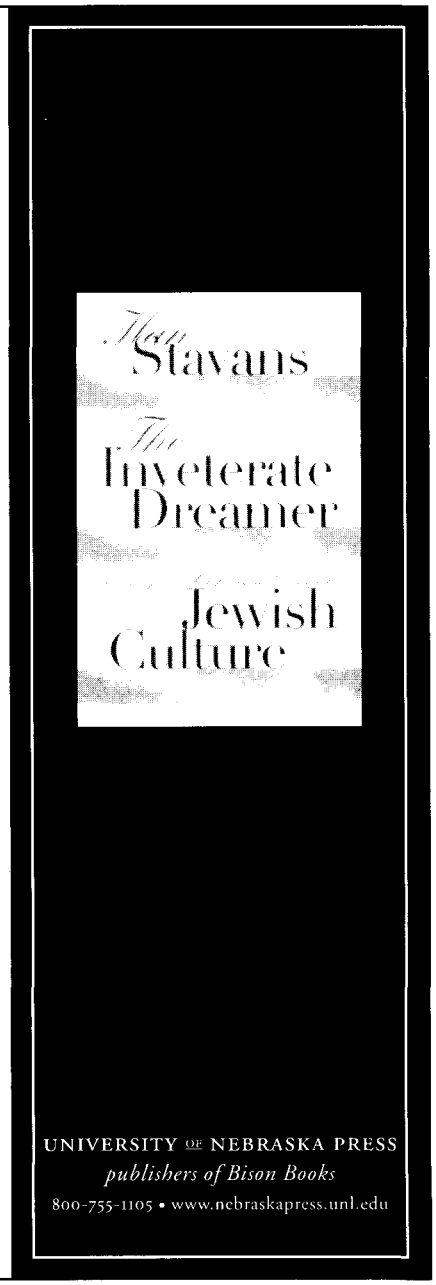

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Know-It-All

Supergenius:
The Mega Worlds
of Herman Kahn

by B. Bruce-Briggs

North American Policy Press. 490 pp. $40.00

Reviewed by
Dan Seligman

ARGUABLY VIOLATING several canons of the reviewing code, I called up the author of this book and asked how come it had not found a major publisher—or, for that matter, any publisher. The question seemed inescapable because (a) the book is enormously interesting, (b) its legendary subject has never had a biography, and (c) I foresaw credibility problems if I were to review favorably a book self-published by an

DAN SELIGMAN *is a contributing editor of* Forbes *and the author of* A Question of Intelligence: The IQ Debate in America.

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author after multiple setbacks on the commercial front.*

Having spoken at length to Barry Bruce-Briggs, I am still not sure of the answer to my question. What I got, mostly, were tales about the terminal stupidity and ineffable political correctness of the publishing world. I did not attempt to contact the publishers who turned the book down. Possibly I would have heard mirror-image tales of an author difficult to work with and slow to turn in a manuscript. (Bruce-Briggs worked on the book for at least twelve years.)

Another possibility is that, somehow or other, Herman Kahn (1922-83) has become a forgotten figure. But can that really be? Kahn was a "policy intellectual" of unquestioned genius and dazzling quotability who was very much onstage and telling the world what to think about its major problems for something like a quarter-century. He had also helped to develop the hydrogen bomb, and later came up with the idea for a Doomsday Machine, immortalized, though wrenched out of context, in Stanley Kubrick's 1963 movie wherein the machine's inventor is called Dr. Strangelove. He was the author or coauthor of hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles and of sixteen books, every one of which received reviews that were respectful even when hostile. And, as Bruce-Briggs states correctly, he had thousands of "chums" (I am identified as one of them), who viewed his talents with awe and found his personality magical, somehow combining elements of a high-speed computer, an eager-to-please four-year-old child, a borscht-belt comic, and Santa Claus.

Early in his career, as a defense analyst at the RAND Corporation, Kahn's briefings—these were didactic lectures, densely factual and logically powerful but still informal, with endless asides, many of them hilarious, and much back-and-forth with the audience—were a huge hit with the military. Later, when he was running the Hudson Institute, the think tank he founded in 1961, his subject matter expanded in all directions, and his public appearances attracted a wider following. He spoke without notes, typically for a couple of hours, and had his audiences alternately entranced and convulsed with laughter. *Supergenius* does a good job of capturing the spirit of these occasions, and also confirms what many long suspected: that much of what Kahn "wrote" was made up of edited transcripts of his talks.

Bruce-Briggs, who had a good inside view of Kahn during several professional stints at Hudson, and was his co-author in a 1972 volume called *Things to Come*, has organized his book more or less chronologically but with an effort to segment particular dimensions of Kahn's life. The somewhat quirky result is 67 sections, typically five or six pages in length, with headings like "The Soldier," "The Systems Analyst," "The Celebrity," "The Nipponologist," "The Neoconservative." (Actually, for most of his life Kahn was rather nonideological.) Bruce-Briggs is on balance strongly pro-Kahn, but, as indicated in some of the headings ("The Huckster," "The Kibitzer"), less than starry-eyed.

To THINK about Herman Kahn is to find yourself amazed about many matters, but three major themes stand out: his intelligence; his long-running, close-to-single-handed effort to make Americans think straight about thermonuclear war; and his remarkably successful forays into "futurology."

A possible fourth entry would be his weight. As a young man, Kahn was merely stocky, but in the years

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of his greatest fame he kept putting on pounds, and must have been close to 375 when he died, quite suddenly, of a stroke. The weight seems to have induced symptoms of narcolepsy, and *Supergenius* has some appalling accounts of Kahn falling asleep and snoring uncontrollably in business meetings during his last few years (but still, somehow, managing to take in a lot of what was being said).

Kahn's career trajectory reflected the fact that he was smarter—usually a lot smarter—than just about everyone else in his life. His parents were ambitious immigrants from Bialystok, but otherwise offered no discernible clues to the genetic basis of his off-the-charts braininess. As a young child, he was a speed-reader who needed (and created) multiple identities so that he could have more library cards and take out more books. A high-school know-it-all, he was once asked to read aloud a famous Latin oration, took a brief glance at the passage, then recited it without the book and offered to do it again, backwards.

Drafted in 1943, Kahn was identified as a prodigy after he took the Armed Forces Qualification Test and was parked in a military "brain bank" in West Virginia. There he was made to study electrical engineering before being transferred to the signal corps and assigned to the China-Burma-India theater. After the war, his friend Sam Cohen (later famous as the main developer and promoter of the neutron bomb), successfully recruited him into RAND, and his career as a defense analyst unfolded rapidly.

His early fame was based mainly on his devastating critique of U.S. military strategy in the thermonuclear age. His core objective, elaborated in *On Thermonuclear War* (1960) and again in *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (1962), was to make his countrymen understand that existing doctrine was disastrous. Its assumptions, based on the idea of a "balance of terror," were embodied in a nightmare scenario in which, as Kahn put it, somebody, presumably a Russian, "pushed all the buttons and then walked away from the table." The only thing deterring the Russians from such a massive and unrestrained attack was, supposedly, the realization that it would be matched in kind—which would mean in turn that both countries would have committed suicide.

That was the theory. Although Stanley Kubrick chose not to read him properly, Kahn's Doomsday Machine—a device set to blow up the planet automatically any time your country was attacked with nuclear weapons—was presented by him not as a rational strategy but as a caricature of this irrational posture. To tell the world that you equated nuclear weapons with national suicide was, he wrote, to invite blackmail—and, given the Soviet superiority in conventional arms, it left us with very few military options in the face of aggressive behavior *short* of an attack on the United States.

The point of all this thinking about the unthinkable was to find serious alternatives to annihilation and surrender. Kahn argued that the alternatives were there. Any thermonuclear war would almost certainly begin as a limited and not as an "all-out" attack, for the simple reason that the attacker would want the other side to have incentives for restraint. With that in mind, Kahn generated an avalanche of data to demonstrate that civil defense and other damage-limiting measures could leave our country still viable even after most imaginable thermonuclear wars. And he also argued that serious planning for such wars—including a "pre-attack mobilization base," some ballistic-missile defense, and what he called a "not incredible first-strike capability"—would itself serve as a deterrent to provocative behavior, and leave us less susceptible to blackmail. Although Kahn was not alone in making this case—his RAND

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colleague Albert Wohlstetter was a major ally—there is no doubt that his briefings and studies had a major impact on the Pentagon's thinking in the 50's and 60's.

At its founding, the Hudson Institute was defense-oriented, and in the late 60's it was still receiving contracts for Vietnam-related research. Kahn was deeply involved in the Pentagon's partially successful "Vietnamization" program, i.e., the effort to pacify the countryside and build up the South Vietnamese armed forces while preparing for American withdrawal. But by this time he and Hudson had also been drawn into a broad range of social-policy issues, which gradually coalesced into a discipline that came to be known as "futurology" (a term he disliked, even as he came to be identified as its prime exemplar).

There is a mystery at the heart of this discipline. (There are also disagreements about whether it deserves the label "discipline.") The threshold question is whether it represents merely informed speculation about the future or a serious effort at forecasting. Kahn was clear about the need for the latter in the area of military technology, but in thinking about long-term social change, his approach seems much more hedged.

One major Kahn exercise in futurology was *The Year 2000*, written with Anthony J. Wiener and published in 1967. (The analysis was Kahn's, the writing was Wiener's.) The authors warned readers up front that the "scenarios" being put forward should be taken only as "imaginative simulations of what might happen," and the subtitle identifies the study as "a framework for speculation." But I have trouble with this.

As I read *The Year 2000*, the authors repeatedly leave their cautions in the dust to argue that some scenarios are, in fact, resoundingly plausible. An intriguing example is their argument for a continuing explosion in computer power and their rejection of the then-popular notion that such power was already approaching its physical limits. It is quite possible, they wrote, that computer capabilities would continue expanding by "a factor of ten every several years"—a judgment consistent with Moore's Law, which posits a doubling every 18 months or so. They also stated that "there will probably be computer consoles in every home," a projection that overstates today's reality even while managing to look remarkably prescient for 1967.

I do not know how to construct a box score, but the "forecasts" in *The Year 2000* look pretty good to me. One big error, quite unsurprising in itself, was to assume the durability

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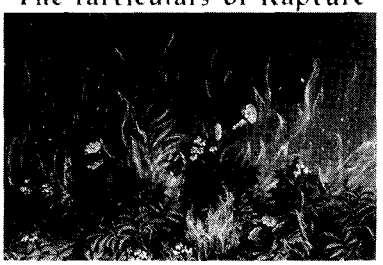

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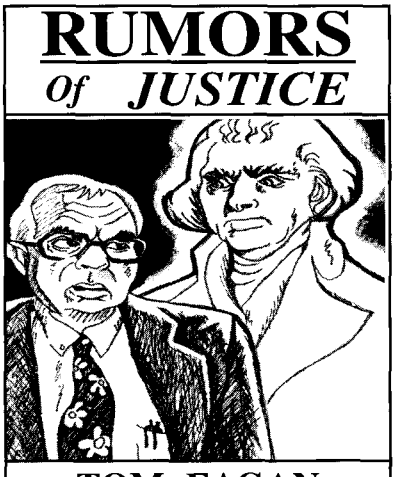
of the Soviet Union, and the authors also possibly overrated the long-term dynamism of the Japanese economy (although it had close to twenty pretty good years after they wrote). But they were seldom misleading about other important matters. Their projection put year-2000 world population around 6 billion, which appears to be just about right, and one of their preferred scenarios for U.S. gross national product per capita (they offer a couple of choices) works out to about $37,500 in today's dollars—also right. The book foresaw relative peace and prosperity for the "older nations"—i.e., Europe, the U.S. and Canada, and the Pacific Rim countries. It also bought wholeheartedly into the idea of a "post-industrial society," then being broached by Daniel Bell and others and now plainly surrounding us.

Kahn's record in futurology was also pretty good in later years. In 1980, in the face of headlines projecting oil prices of $60 a barrel or more, Kahn and William M. Brown, Hudson's energy economist, forecast that prices would instead collapse, which they did (from $40 a barrel to less than $20). With marvelous timing, Kahn produced a 1982 book about the U.S. economy called *The Coming Boom*.

Is he really a forgotten figure today? I hope not. But it is true that the themes he was most associated with are themselves offstage. For better or worse, thermonuclear war has pretty much receded from public consciousness. And futurology—long-term, broad-gauge social forecasting—seems unimaginably difficult in a world featuring successive stunners in biotechnology. Still, I would hate to think that the man who put "thinking about the unthinkable" into the public dialogue has fallen prey to a different syndrome: forgetting the unforgettable. At a minimum, he deserves the $15 download.



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By the Numbers

The First Measured Century: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900-2000

by Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, and Ben J. Wattenberg

AEI. 308 pp. $20.00

Reviewed by
Noah D. Oppenheim

MONEY, IT is well known, cannot buy happiness, but losing money can certainly impinge on the enjoyment of life. Such was the case in the first half of the 20th century, when our national suicide rate soared as economic indicators plummeted, reaching its peak as the Great Depression hit its nadir. But then, with the coming of World War II, the suicide rate declined sharply and has since stabilized, with some minor fluctuations, over the past five decades.

Even so, more Americans today kill themselves than are killed by others—which is just one of the many fascinating and sometimes paradoxical things to be learned from a perusal of *The First Measured Century: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900-2000*. Edited by Ben J. Wattenberg, a lifelong student of public opinion, and the sociologists Theodore Caplow and Louis Hicks, this statistical album summarizes a century of dramatic social change. In form, the book is a compendium of charts, mostly derived from government data, each of them accompanied by a brief essay explaining its significance and bringing together a variety of related facts and explanations. But in substance it is more: a series of highly compelling and highly suggestive snapshots that reveal where our society has come from and where it might be heading.

The most radically sloping lines can be found in the section devoted to family life. Looking at these graphs—of the rising divorce rate, the climbing number of illegitimate births, and the accelerating decline of two-parent households—pessimists will find their worst fears confirmed. Among the general population, the virgin bride is on her way to becoming an extinct species. Nearly 75 percent of nineteen-year-olds have engaged in premarital sex. Among poor American blacks, the family dissolution pointed to by Daniel Patrick Moynihan almost four decades ago continues apace and

NOAH D. OPPENHEIM *is a producer at MSNBC's* Hardball with Chris Matthews.

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ever more intensely. And the "ancient stigma of bastardy," as Wattenberg and his coauthors put it in a typically pointed sidebar, is "no longer recognized by law or public opinion."

But *The First Measured Century* is by no means all doom and gloom. Far from it: stunningly documented in its pages is the near-relentless growth of prosperity and the spread of comfort. Over the last century, America's real Gross Domestic Product per capita multiplied by a factor of eight, with the economy expanding in every decade. This includes the 1930's: from our present vantage point, indeed, and in the broader sweep of things, the Great Depression looks only like an insignificant dip. And, even though the boom-and-bust seesaw of the business cycle remains a fact of life, the vacillations have grown steadily more gentle since the 1950's.

These broad trends have translated into the betterment of most Americans' material circumstances. The real incomes of middle-class households are today five times higher than they were 100 years ago, and even those trapped in poverty live far better and longer than their counterparts then. Infant mortality is one compelling indicator of our progress: in 1900, one of six children died before reaching his first birthday; today, that figure is one out of every 141 children.

The First Measured Century does not expose any bizarre hidden features of American life, or deliver any major shocks. But some of the trends it reports do run counter to what one might expect. Despite the unprecedented collapse of family ties—and despite the rise of the scientific worldview—participation in organized religion grew steadily in the 20th century. In its early years, only 41 percent of Americans belonged to a religious organization; today, the number approaches 70 percent, with some 40 percent attending prayer services once a week.

Then, too, at a time of widespread concern over the failures of our educational system and a deeper interest in video games than in reading, *The First Measured Century* shows a nearly vertical upward trend in the number of new books published annually. To be sure, as Wattenberg and his coauthors note, reading is still "largely a function of education and income; the higher their education and income, the more likely people [are] to read books." But the very slope of the graph is startling and curiously heartening.

From a work that itself refrains from reaching any overarching conclusions, it is difficult to draw broad or universal lessons. That, however, may be a virtue. From the number of post offices to the number of blind persons receiving public assistance, individual facts in *The First Measured Century* are left to speak for themselves, or are explained individually, rather than being quick-marched into the service of some grand idea.

Impossible though it may be to generalize from the multifaceted picture sketched here, what is clear after a century of self-measurement is that we live at one and the same time in a far richer and more equitable society and in a far more troubled one, particularly when it comes to the way we conduct our most intimate relations. By plotting such things on graphs, Wattenberg and his colleagues at least allow us to replace both smugness and nostalgia with some precise knowledge of how we have soared, and where we have strayed.

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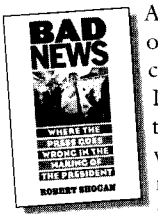

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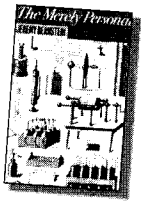

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Pariah

Looking for Mr. Nobody:
The Secret Life of
Goronwy Rees
by Jenny Rees
Transaction. 295 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
David Pryce-Jones

GORONWY REES was a casualty of the ideological struggles of the 1930's. A gifted writer, a Marxist, and a fellow-traveler, he was briefly part of the notorious network of Soviet agents in Great Britain that included Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt, and others known and unknown. Conscience-stricken afterward, he never managed to cut his way through the conflict of loyalties between his country and these friends. Here is a theme fit for a classical drama.

Coincidentally, in the United States, Whittaker Chambers was experiencing the equivalent moral dilemma. Authors of their own misfortune, Rees and Chambers had much in common. They were self-made; they possessed striking literary gifts; and they owed a great deal to devoted wives. They were also hesitant by nature and prone to accidents, and suffered from depression and occasional mental breakdown. For both, conspiring on behalf of Communism bolstered their self-image as lonely wanderers in a hostile world. And for both, the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, in which Communism displayed itself in all its true brutality and cynicism, came as a shattering revelation that led to a decisive break.

For many liberals, both Rees and Chambers were later to become figures of infamy—not for anything treasonable they might have done in the past, but for what they would in time feel impelled to reveal about their former Communist associates. But there the parallel between the two men stops. Chambers finally found the resources of character to rise to the test, working through the machinery of the law and in full view of the American public. Rees did not.

Jenny Rees, a journalist and Goronwy Rees's eldest daughter, grew up to appreciate and love both her father and her mother Margie, but she also had a disturbing sense that over her father's life hung questions requiring an answer. Her book about him is much more than a work of filial piety; it is a careful and complete examination of a brilliant but puzzled and ultimately rather sad man who had the chance to do himself justice but never quite did.

BORN IN Aberystwyth, in north Wales, in 1909, Rees was the son of a strict but affectionate Calvinist minister and was brought up speaking Welsh at home. (Goronwy means "spring of sparkling water," an apt name for a beautiful and eager boy.) He went to Oxford in 1928 on a scholarship, to discover there the sort of high life that his contemporary Evelyn Waugh would memorialize in *Brideshead Revisited*. In an open examination held once a year, All Souls College offers two graduate fellowships, perhaps the most prestigious academic awards in Britain. Duly elected, Goronwy found himself at the age of twenty-two in the most exclusive of all Oxford settings; his daughter lists his colleagues as "one archbishop, one bishop, an ex-Viceroy of India, several cabinet ministers of the detested Conservative party, two of the country's most brilliant barristers . . . and [the] editor of the [London] *Times*."

Heady stuff. But, as Rees himself would write much later in a memoir, *A Chapter of Accidents* (1972), he was "more often than not" miserable at Oxford. So swiftly recruited to the establishment, he was unsure how to reconcile his cosmopolitan success with his provincial past, and drifted accordingly. He drifted in more ways than one: among the many women who fell for his Byronic good looks in those years were Sheila Grant Duff, an anti-Nazi publicist for the Czechs before and during the war, and the novelists Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamond Lehmann.

The Depression and Marxism at last gave Rees some sense of purpose. Hardly alone in this, he was rather "just like a young hopeful between the wars," to quote another contemporary, William Plomer, in a satirical poem about those who believed that "only the Left Wing could ever be right / and that Moscow, of all places, was the source of light." In that spirit, Rees taught himself fluent German and visited Germany and the Soviet Union in the early 1930's. In the former, horrified by Hitler and Nazism, he observed a desperate balance "between disasters past and disasters yet to come." In the latter, he concluded that there had been genuine "evolution" thanks to Stalin's Five-Year Plan, and that the democracies might "have something to learn" from it.

THEN, IN about 1934, as Jenny Rees dates it, Guy Burgess entered his life. At the core of Rees's *A Chapter of Accidents* is a superb portrait of this flamboyantly destructive character, with his clever conversation and charm, his garlic-chewing bohemianism, his dirty clothes, his indiscriminate homosexuality, snobbery, and self-importance. Trying futilely to seduce Rees, Burgess did succeed in throwing around him a misleading aura of homosexuality. But his ideological seduction was more effective. Jenny Rees describes how the two traveled to a Communist-front meeting of writers in Paris where Rees was flattered to be

DAVID PRYCE-JONES, *the British political analyst, is the author of* The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire. *His review of* The Abolition of Britain *by Peter Hitchens appeared in our November 2000 issue.*

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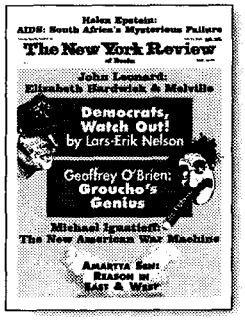

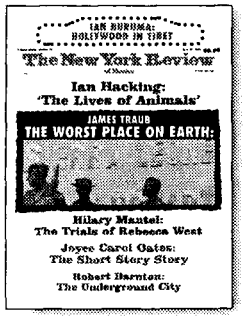

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hobnobbing with the likes of Louis Aragon and Theodore Dreiser.

The friendship with Burgess came to a head at the end of 1937, when Rees published a quasi-Marxist article about the poverty of Welsh coal miners. This article, Burgess asserted, had "the heart of the matter in it," and he abruptly confided to Rees that at Cambridge he had become an active agent of the Comintern. Presumably in breach of Moscow's instructions, Burgess also gave the surprised and skeptical Rees the name of his own controller. In *A Chapter of Accidents*, in language unusually muddy for him, Rees would write: "I don't suppose he could have named a person who could have carried more weight with me . . . and . . . with whom I would have joined in any enterprise." As for the identity of this man, undisclosed by Rees even 35 years after the event in question, the world has since learned it was the eminent art historian Anthony Blunt.

Exactly what happened between Rees and Burgess in the eighteen months following this 1937 conversation remains obscure, and Jenny Rees cannot supply details. Burgess certainly invited his friend to become, like him, a Soviet agent. But how much Rees compromised himself, and what help he could have offered to the Soviets, is unclear.

Then came 1939 and Rees's revulsion at the Nazi-Soviet pact and consequent break with Moscow. Burgess visited him, in a panic that Rees would give him and Blunt away to the authorities; but he need not have worried. Although Rees believed Burgess had been telling him the truth about his and Blunt's spy ring, the *whole* truth seems to have been, in some sense, just too unbelievable. The contradiction paralyzed him, and, although ceasing himself to be any kind of agent, he kept Burgess's secret all through the ensuing world war.

During that war, employing his German-language skills for intelligence and planning, Rees became a member of Field Marshal Montgomery's staff and thus privy to military secrets. He also continued to see Burgess and Blunt quite regularly. (The two conspirators shared a house, whose rackety atmosphere Jenny Rees evokes very well.) A day even came when Rees had in his briefcase the complete operational orders for the invasion of France. Had he been an agent at that point, the Comintern would have pulled off a great coup.

After the war, Guy Burgess wormed his way through the BBC, the Foreign Office, and the British embassy in Washington, where he joined another member of the Cambridge ring, Donald Maclean. But in 1951, back in England and correctly anticipating exposure, Burgess and Maclean quite suddenly disappeared. A Third Man was rumored to have made the necessary arrangements for their defection, and behind him was said to be a Fourth Man, then a Fifth, a whole column of invisible traitors inside the British foreign service and security apparatus.

On the very day of his disappearance, Burgess spoke for twenty minutes on the telephone to Rees's wife Margie—without, of course, letting on what he was about to do. But Jenny Rees now says that her father sensed intuitively his friend's fear of imminent exposure—a sense amply confirmed when Anthony Blunt, aware that Rees was in a unique position to expose *him*, swiftly showed up in his home and urged upon him E.M. Forster's advice that it was better to betray one's country than one's friend.

At last, Rees resolved to tell British intelligence what he knew. But

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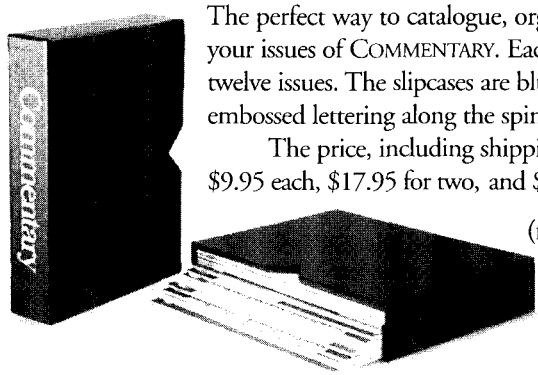

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something mysterious then occurred, for which neither Jenny Rees nor anyone else has an explanation. Called in for a debriefing, he discovered that he was instead to enjoy a social luncheon with Guy Liddell, a senior intelligence operative, at which Blunt contrived to be present. And there the matter rested. At a future date, MI-5 would cut a secret deal not to prosecute Blunt in return for a full confession—though even then he played false, withholding or distorting information.

TWO YEARS after Burgess's defection, Rees was appointed principal of the University College of Wales, in his home town of Aberystwyth. In thoughtful pages, Jenny Rees balances her own happy childhood there against the narrowness of the Welsh academics, their exclusion of her mother Margie, and their disdain for the worldly Rees. He himself would later judge that this return to his roots had been a mistake—but the mistake became a disaster when Burgess and Maclean suddenly surfaced in Moscow to crow about how they had deceived British intelligence. In the immediate aftermath, there appeared in a London tabloid, the *People*, a series of five explosive articles about Burgess and his circle, written by an anonymous but evidently well-informed author whom it was fairly simple to identify as Goronwy Rees.

The publication of such sensitive material in such a cheap style—having given the material to the paper on condition of anonymity, Rees had also conferred upon it the right to rewrite and sensationalize—caused a scandal that Jenny Rees captures very well. Intellectuals of every stripe fell upon Rees for betraying his friends. (Blunt was not identified by name in the articles, though to insiders there were giveaway phrases like "one of the country's most celebrated academic figures.") In an exact metaphor, the Cambridge don Noel Annan was to write later that, though the explosion detonated by the articles was atomic, "the blast walls of the Establishment are so cunningly constructed that the person most hideously wounded was Goronwy Rees himself." Denied the motives of conscience or public spirit, Rees instead became a pariah comparable to Whittaker Chambers. Aberystwyth professors combined in outrage to force him to resign, and his career never recovered.

ONE DAY in 1961, I was invited to have a drink with Arthur Koestler, an opponent of Communism par excellence. There, very much at home in Koestler's circle, was a conspicuously handsome man with silvery hair and the brick-red cheeks of a hardened drinker, who declared to the room that Anthony Blunt—keeper of the royal collection of pictures, honored scholar and courtier, a member of the British security services during the war and after—was a leading Comintern agent in Britain, and had tried to recruit him before the war. "Have you heard what I've just heard?" I asked the literary critic John Mander, standing next to me. "Oh," he replied, "don't you know Goronwy Rees? That's his party piece."

Rees was evidently obsessed with Blunt—and yet he was still protecting in public the identity of a man whom in private he denounced as a despicable traitor. In the 60's and 70's Rees wrote a regular column for the intellectual monthly *Encounter*, whose editor, Melvin Lasky, another intimate of the Koestler circle, would have supported him unconditionally had he resolved to say what he knew. But not until 1979, with the publication of Andrew Boyle's *The Climate of Treason*, was Blunt publicly exposed as the traitor he had so long and cold-bloodedly been. By then Rees was on his deathbed. In the hospital, in a final interview with Andrew Boyle, he summed up the matter in a spirit more of wistfulness than revenge: "Anthony Blunt cast a long shadow over my life, just as I may have cast a long shadow over his."

THESE DECADES of painful prevarication, according to Jenny Rees, have explanations that stem from personality as well as from historical context. Too insecure to resolve conflicting loyalties, Rees felt socially out of his depth. Not knowing himself well enough to be consistent, he was at the mercy of warring impulses. For all his brilliance, she insists, he was always Mr. Nobody inside.

But there was more to it than that. In the early 1990's, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Jenny Rees contacted Oleg Tsarev, formerly a colonel in the KGB and later its trusted historical consultant. In Moscow, Tsarev produced documentary evidence that Burgess (under the code name Mädchen, or Girlie, a fine specimen of KGB humor) had indeed recruited Rees to be what was called in the trade a "source" and an "operational contact." Rees had consented, Tsarev thought, out of a combination of romanticism and ideological conviction. His role was a "shadowy" one, consisting solely, it seems, of passing on conversation from the All Souls high table. When, at their meeting after the Nazi-Soviet pact, Rees told Burgess he was not going to continue as a Comintern agent, Burgess assured him that he, too, was ceasing his espionage. Her father, Jenny Rees now supposes, took Burgess at his word. The shock of learning over a decade later that both Burgess and Blunt had deceived him led to severe guilt, and also to the fear that somehow they might contrive to blackmail or incriminate him.

"I had no ambition to be the British Whittaker Chambers," Rees wrote in his autobiography, in a moment of self-revelation. True, he had no pumpkin papers to support what he told the authorities about Burgess and Blunt; it was his word

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against theirs. And his own treason, Jenny Rees makes clear, cannot have been so very terrible: security was not endangered, no lives were lost. But there is cause for regret nevertheless.

So bizarre and multiple were the deceptions and cover-ups throughout British government in those decades that still today a number of politicians and officials, including some in the intelligence services themselves (Guy Liddell, for one), have been suspected as Soviet agents and not definitively cleared. If Rees had had some of the same dogged courage as Chambers, he might have forced into the open the whole issue of Communist infiltration in Britain, helping to expose the rot and defeatism at the top of the country while there was still time to do something about it. Then he would have been Mr. Somebody.

Holy Ground

The End of Days:
Fundamentalism and the
Struggle for the Temple Mount
by Gershom Gorenberg
Free Press. 288 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Pipes

THE TEMPLE Mount in the old city of Jerusalem is once again in the news. Last July, Ehud Barak, then the prime minister of Israel, amazed the world by offering to cede to Yasir Arafat partial sovereignty over this, the holiest of Jewish sites. A scant two months later, the Palestinians responded to Israel's latest round of concessions by renewing their campaign of violence; interestingly, they portrayed their action, at least initially, as being motivated by a determination to protect a mosque atop that same Mount. When, this past February, Ariel Sharon was elected Israel's prime minister, he for his part asserted in one of his very first policy statements that Jerusalem would remain "the united and undivided capital of the state of Israel, with the Temple Mount in its center, for all eternity."

It is thus reasonable enough that Gershom Gorenberg, an American who has lived in Jerusalem since 1977 and is now a senior editor at the *Jerusalem Report*, should call this site "the most contested piece of real estate on earth." For not only is this man-made hill the place where two ancient Jewish Temples were built and where two principal Islamic sacred sites—the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque—now stand, it is also, as Gorenberg writes in *The End of Days*, the locus of "millennial dreams" for many Christians.

In this well-written book, published just before the outbreak of violence last September, Gorenberg focuses on the role played by the Temple Mount in the expectations of "millions of quite rational men and women, belonging to established religious movements around the globe, [who] look forward to history's conclusion, to be followed by the establishment of a perfected era." Although all three major monotheisms get their due in *The End of Days*, Gorenberg's main focus is on Christians and Jews. Muslims are cast, somewhat imprecisely, as spectators.

AS GORENBERG tells it, a large number of evangelical Christians believe that the Second Coming of Jesus will occur after a long sequence of events both miraculous and terrible. In the "rapture of the church," a phrase popularized by the 19th-century British preacher John Darby, true Christians will fly up to heaven while the rest of the world faces seven years of tribulation preceeding the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Among the many events taking place in those years of tribulation, the Antichrist will desecrate the Temple in Jerusalem—an act suggesting by implication that the Temple itself will have to be rebuilt before the Last Days and the Second Coming can occur.

About one-quarter of American Christians, known technically as premillennial dispensationalists, adhere to at least aspects of this vision. Thanks to missionary efforts, the numbers of such Christians are growing in both Latin America and East Asia (though not in Western Europe). The spread of their ideas about the end of the world can also be seen in the sales of books. The *Left Behind* series, a sequence of thrillers by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye that follow premillennial dispensationalist lines, has sold ten million copies (and a major film based on it has now been released). Still more spectacularly, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), another treatment of the "endtimes" and the return of Jesus, has sold some 34 million copies in 54 languages and may be the biggest-selling book of the late 20th century.

In America, at least, views of this general nature are hardly recent additions to the Christian landscape. Millennialism, Gorenberg writes, "came over with the *Mayflower*, and was to be a mark of American religion from then on." One curious result was the spawning of a 19th-century Christian Zionist tendency that predated political Zionism among Jews, and was in place to welcome and buttress the latter's emergence. Thus, in an 1891 petition known as the Blackstone Memorial, named after a Chicago evangelist, 413 prominent American Jews and Christians called upon the President to hold "an international conference to consider the condition of the Israelites

DANIEL PIPES *is director of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum, a columnist for the* Jerusalem Post, *and the author of* Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From *(Free Press).*

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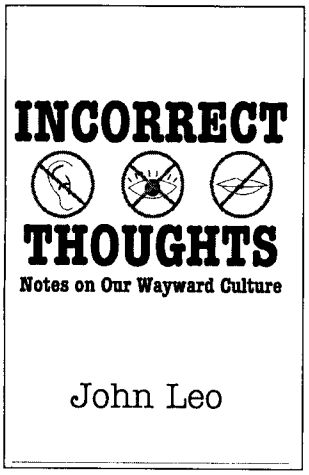

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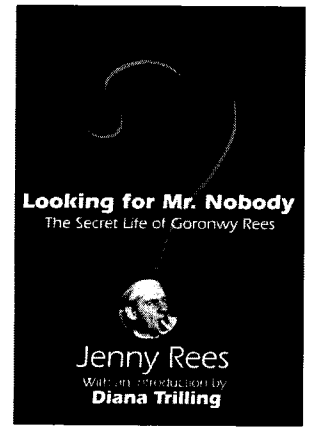
Jenny Rees

With an introduction by Diana Trilling



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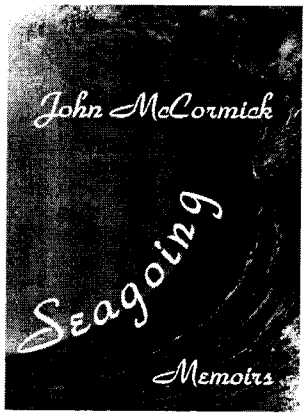

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John McCormick

The title of John McCormick's autobiographical book may be taken both literally and symbolically. In a literal sense, going to sea was an early and powerful ambition, while seagoing is also a metaphor for the twists and turns in a rootless life, a long voyaging. This is not a conventional autobiography. It is personal only as necessary for continuity, and never confessional. The essays center upon telling episodes in the author's life and strive for objectivity and accuracy about the recent past, both personal and historical. He does so, as he writes, without "any pretension of producing a true history." The events of his life are necessarily unique to him, thus he finds uniqueness in the events that impinged upon him.

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and their claims to Palestine as their ancient home." To some Christians, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, expressing the sympathy of the British government with Zionist aspirations, seemed an ancient prophecy come true; how much more so, the establishment of an independent Israel in 1948. In 1967, Israel's recapture of the Temple Mount in the Six-Day war offered absolute proof to some of the prophecy's validity, prompting a turn toward Christian revivalism and increased hopes for a rebuilding of the Temple.

In short, millions of Christians around the world sincerely and devoutly believe that the status of the buildings on a plaza in Jerusalem will determine the fate of the human experience, if not of the cosmos. And this means, as Gorenberg writes, that, "through no choice of its own," the state of Israel has been cast "in a starring role in a Christian Endtime drama." According to the terms of that drama, it is imperative not just that Israel control the Temple Mount; the urgent task of rebuilding the Temple is a task uniquely designated for Jews, not Christians, to carry out. However eager evangelicals may be to see a Third Temple rise, the most they can do is to nudge Jews in the preferred direction.

Broadly speaking, this means supporting Israel in its conflict with the Arabs, and favoring the party in Israel (Likud) that takes the harder line. It also means, of course, agitating for continued Jewish control of the Temple Mount. Some Christians get involved in more direct ways, by giving generous support, moral and financial alike, to those few Jews who are themselves intent on rebuilding the Temple. In a piquant chapter titled "Cattlemen of the Apocalypse," Gorenberg tells the story of some Christians who have tried to help breed a purely red heifer, an animal whose burnt ashes, according to the Bible, are needed to cleanse the Temple priests of ritual impurity.

As for the Jews who also harbor hopes for a Third Temple, they are gathered in tiny groups with names like the Temple Mount Faithful and the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, their numbers swollen somewhat by those who quarter-believe or half-believe in their goals. Those goals encompass an end to all warfare and an era beyond history. One leader, quoted by Gorenberg, believes that an effort to build the Temple "will bring peace, will bring security, will cure all the ills of society!" (Others may conclude it would precipitate Muslim retaliation and terrible bloodshed.) Some are working toward this end by preparing the precise clothing, coinage, and sacrificial implements needed for use in a rebuilt Temple.

And Muslims? With great wariness and a certain bellicosity, they are watching any potential movement between Jews and Christians to pull down the Islamic buildings on the Mount that are collectively known as *Al-Haram ash-Sharif* (the Noble Sanctuary). What this can mean was seen in September 1996, when the Palestinian leadership provoked a large riot after the Israeli government opened a tunnel exit in Jerusalem a full 200 yards away from al-Aqsa mosque; the subsequent violence resulted in nearly 80 deaths. Similarly, it might not be amiss to see the current Palestinian uprising against Israel as a form of preemptive protection of the mosque at a highly delicate time: the millennial *intifada*.

More surprisingly, Muslims have also become swept up in Temple Mount fever. In fact, so affected have they become by ideas deriving from the West that many now adapt aspects of Christian evangelical eschatology to Islamic ends. Thus, apocalypse-minded Muslims see the creation of Israel as the beginning of a process that is moving toward either the triumph of Islam, the destruction of Israel, or the end of the world. Symbolically, the Christian year 2000 took on for these Muslims a significance that mainstream Islam would never allow, with several popular if heterodox publications announcing that the Antichrist (*dajjal* in Arabic) would arrive in that year. The fact that some Muslims have come to believe that the world's end is being determined by events taking place at the Temple Mount further inflames an already tense situation—although in practical terms, since the main interest of Muslims lies in maintaining the status quo there, they are not likely to be the ones intentionally taking triggering actions.

"IT IS all too possible that someone, today anonymous, will try to ignite [a catastrophe] at the Mount," writes Gorenberg. And indeed it would take very little to set off a conflagration in this piece of territory, whose ancient walls and buildings could easily be blown up or otherwise destroyed by even a small band of zealots.

Gorenberg fears that such events could happen soon. In religious thought, "millennium" properly refers not to a year with three zeroes but to a long era marking the end of normal history and the beginning of God's kingdom. If anything, millennial fevers may be higher this year than during the year 2000 because so many who were expecting the End last year have been disappointed. The historical record shows how such disappointments can lead to violence, and offers a warning to anyone who breathed a sigh of relief when the calendar changed to 2001. "The day after the last is most dangerous," Gorenberg observes.

There is also a lesson here for those who might be tempted to dismiss as "Bible babble" a set of beliefs that are in themselves neither nonsensical nor fraudulent. In this country, ignoring the apocalyptic views of David Koresh contributed significantly to the disastrous outcome at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Similarly,

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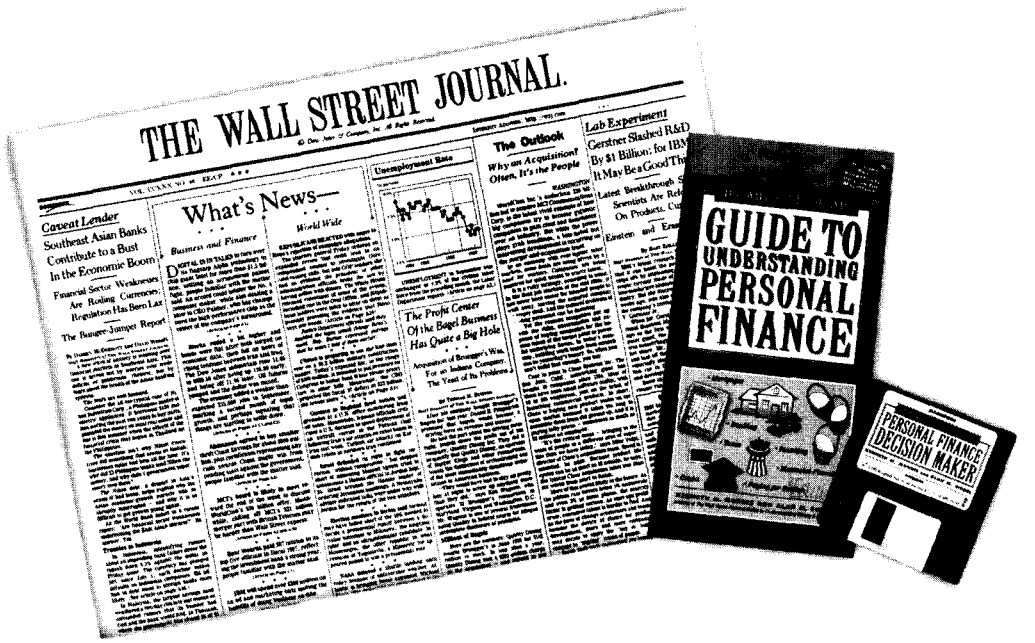
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writes Gorenberg, by ignoring the "theological crisis set off by the Oslo Accord" among some Jews, Israeli authorities left themselves unprepared for an event like the massacre at Hebron carried out in 1994 by Baruch Goldstein. To forestall violence, he cautions, the authorities must tread a fine line: "not treat beliefs as criminal [but] understand where those beliefs could lead."

There is also a more general need—the need to understand one's friends. In accepting support from "Bible-believing" Christian allies, Israelis have pointedly overlooked a few stipulations of the millennial agenda, one of which has to do with the prospective wholesale conversion to Christianity of the "terminal" generation of Jews. On the other side, some evangelicals seem not to have taken in the fact that, a few marginal figures aside, Israelis have no intention of tearing down the Islamic holy places to build a temple.

Surely it is a worrisome sign when each side of a working relationship shelters its own expectations from the other; or when, as Gorenberg writes, each side "often regards the other as an unknowing instrument for reaching a higher goal." His concern is that, disappointed by a Jewish failure to begin the required work of rebuilding, Christian enthusiasts may see Jews as obstructing the rapture and again failing Jesus. "When the 'terminal' generation [of Jews] refuses to reach its terminus, an old frustration with Jews who won't play their role is all too likely to surface."

There is at least one precedent for such a change in mood, not mentioned by Gorenberg but lately studied by Michael Barkun of Syracuse University. British-Israelism, a Christian movement that was pro-Zionist before the state of Israel came into existence, turned anti-Zionist when it found itself not invited to help in building the new country. "Like contemporary fundamentalists," Barkun writes, "they needed a Jewish state in Palestine for theological reasons, but that didn't necessarily mean they liked Jews." The British-Israel movement in turn spawned the Christian Identity movement, also known as the Aryan Nation, perhaps the most virulently racist and anti-Semitic Christian movement in existence today.

Gorenberg is right to worry about issues connected to the Temple Mount, for they have a unique capacity to precipitate shuddering international crises. At the same time, however, his account underscores the need carefully to differentiate between moderates and extremists, especially when dealing with a phenomenon as variegated as American evangelical Christianity. Beliefs are one thing, acting on them something else. Like Jews who pray three times every day for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of animal sacrifice, the great majority of evangelicals have no trouble distinguishing between the realms of ultimate belief and of worldly action. Thus far, with the exception of a handful of extremists, the center has held, and there is a good chance to expect it will continue to do so.

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Robert Conquest is a senior research fellow and scholar-curator of the Russian and Commonwealth of Independent States Collection at the Hoover Institution.

"The cold war is over" One sometimes hears this put forward with the implication that there is no more to be said on the subject and nothing to be learned from it. But, of course, events do not cease to be of significance because they belong to the past. **The cold war's effects are very much with us in two major spheres.**

First, the Russia that has emerged, since Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze abandoned the unappeasable and total claims of the Soviet regime in 1991, has only had ten years to start recuperating.

In Russia, a centuries-old tradition of despotism and imperialism was greatly enhanced by seventy years of continual physical and mental terror. Even the most liberal of the Russian intelligentsia speak of the distortion their minds still feel. As to the less liberal, recent events have left them with the imperialist idea of "Russian greatness" as their only conceptual refuge. In the early 1990s, Russian leaders were frank and clear about the issues of the cold war. That has changed—as is strikingly illustrated in a recent issue of *International Affairs* (which is in effect an organ of the Russian foreign ministry), where a long, unsigned conspectus of the past century has a sequence of such interpretations as,

> *The first steps toward a cold war were made by the United States, which would not like to see East Europe falling under Soviet influence.... The Truman Doctrine was one of the United States' first practical steps in the unleashing of the cold war....The Marshall Plan Talks on the program were at first attended by the USSR but it dropped out since Moscow was asked to pull out of East Europe, something the Soviet leaders could not agree to do. The Marshall Plan in fact initiates a split of Europe after the war.... The Warsaw Pact was founded by representatives of eight East European socialist countries who signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. It formed a worthy counterbalance to NATO.*

This shows a very nasty mood in Russian foreign policy circles—back to anti-Western misinformation and degeneration into worldwide troublemaking Our own foreign policy makers have been aware of moods in Moscow.

But, of course, that false view is also found in the West. The CNN television series on the cold war, with Joseph Stalin balanced by Joseph McCarthy, Kennedy worse than Castro, was a large-scale example But this type of thing is also to be found in a whole series of products of the academic presses that misrepresent the whole communist phenomenon—the educated media in general, apart from the CNN debacle, being less susceptible.

Such misleading attitudes can only have a bad effect on the informed Western citizen's grasp of today's problems and on the political circles that formulate policies. **Ignorance of history is bad enough but especially on these issues.** Thus, on these interpolated fronts, in Russia and the West, the cold war is still very much a burning issue.

— Robert Conquest

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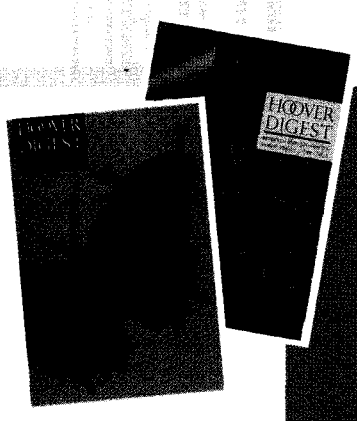

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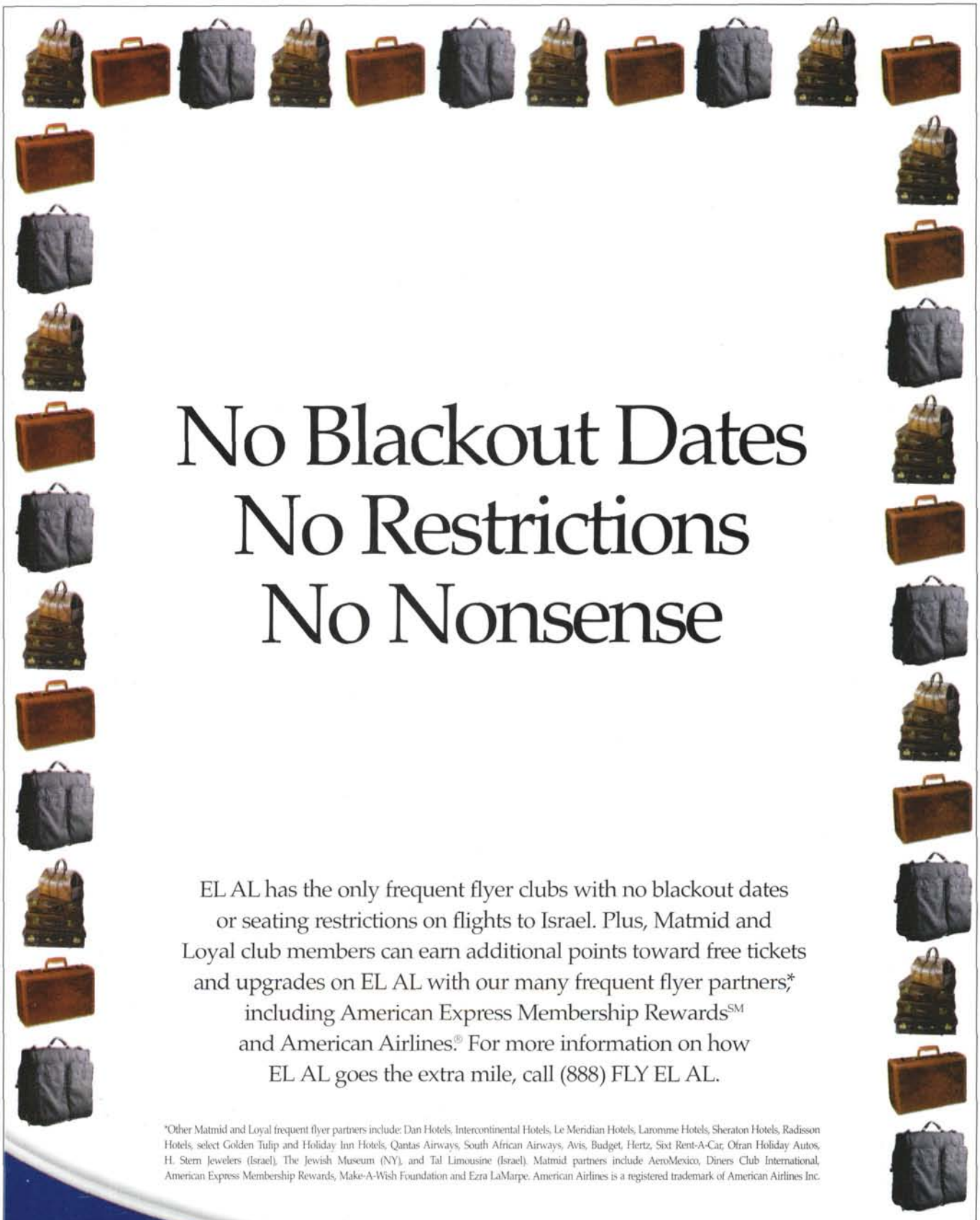

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